Matters of the heart

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Matters of the Heart

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Foreword

Mirja Thomas (née Särkiniemi) moved to her husband's home country of Germany in 1964. They worked there in the healthcare sector and, in the 1970s, in their own company. After moving with her family to Australia in 1982, Mirja Thomas wanted to deepen her skills in spiritual care. She studied at the University of Brisbane for three years (*Diploma in Applied Science Counseling*), specializing in Christian spiritual care in her fourth year. She works as a therapist and spiritual counselor on the Sunshine Coast on Australia's east coast.

I had the pleasure of meeting Mirja Thomaksen in 1978. Our acquaintance deepened into friendship and later into a working relationship. Since the 1960s, I have been interested in spiritual care issues. Working with Mirja Thomas has significantly deepened and broadened my perspective on spiritual care and its necessity. Since the 1980s, we have organized numerous spiritual care seminars in Finland, Brussels, Tallinn, and Moscow. In Russia, Mirja Thomas spent a couple of months in the early 2000s lecturing and working as a therapist in different parts of the country, including Siberia. Her lecture material was published in Russian in a book on spiritual care in connection with a seminar held in Moscow in 2012.

I myself have held numerous spiritual care seminars in Finland, Stockholm, Brussels, and as a speaker in St. Petersburg. The need for spiritual care has not diminished, but rather increased. Hardly any of us

can avoid having our hearts broken. When we push difficult issues into our subconscious, we end up bitter with disappointment. Fortunately, we can choose the path of healing and embark on a journey into ourselves. God has promised to be with us and help everyone who asks for His help.

The purpose of this book is to reveal many of the problems we face in our own hearts and to help us overcome them. Mirja Thomas wrote the text, which I edited and condensed into its final form. Special thanks go to illustrator Anita Mustonen and Tiina and Hannu Iskala for the graphic design, layout, and proofreading of the book.

I hope that readers of this book will enjoy reading it and that God will richly bless their lives. Ideally, you should find someone trustworthy close to you with whom you can share your most difficult issues. The support of another person and shared prayer are helpful in these sensitive areas.

Kaarina, December 2016

Sointu Elo, Master of Arts

1

The work of the Holy Spirit in us

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:26, NIV).

God’s eternal Holy Spirit worked together with the Father and the Son in creation, in Jesus becoming human, and also in redemption. He filled Christ with the power of life. He draws us to himself, bringing us to repentance and awareness of sin. Those who respond to his call humble themselves, repent of their sins, and forgive those who have offended them. These people are gradually renewed and transformed by the Holy Spirit into the image of God.

A devout man came to me. He wanted to get closer to God, but didn't know how. He read the Bible every day and fasted from time to time. He felt that his prayers were not reaching beyond the ceiling. We prayed together that God would show him what was hindering his connection with God. “The sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:4). After our prayer, the Holy Spirit spoke to him: “You serve money, not God.” The man was surprised, but he was ready to admit it and ask God for forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). I asked God to cleanse him from his greed for money. I asked God if there was anything else in his heart: whatever you want to cleanse today, tell him. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that “you serve yourself, not me.” The man was astonished, but he admitted his selfishness, asked God for forgiveness, and renounced this sin. Next, God showed him his pride. The man was ready to confess that to God as well. Then God showed him that he had practiced the occult. His curiosity about the supernatural had led him astray, until his wife left him, taking their children with her. His finances collapsed because his business went bankrupt. His pain drove him to God. He had recently given his life to Jesus, but repentance had remained left undone. Now he was ready to confess all his sins to God, ask for forgiveness, and renounce his service to the devil. “We have abandoned everything

We do not deceive, nor do we distort the word of God, but we reveal the truth and hope that everyone will evaluate us in their own conscience before God (2 Cor. 4:2). We prayed and worked together for two hours. In this way, we plowed part of the field of his heart. The Bible speaks of strongholds. "We live in this world, but we do not fight as the world does. Our weapons are not human weapons, but they have the power given by God to destroy strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3–5). After the pastoral care session, the man felt relieved. He came to see me a few times, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we worked to purify the soil of his heart. Today, he hears God's voice and helps other people come closer to God.

"The human heart is deceitful, wicked, and incurable beyond compare! Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jer. 17:9–10).

We do not know our own hearts. If we want to get closer to God, we must ask the Holy Spirit to show us the condition of our hearts. We must face our own difficulties, sins, and wounds and admit that we have them. If we are stubborn and deny our difficulties, we make God a liar. "If we claim to be without sin, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). At the same time, we deny ourselves the freedom that God has promised us.

"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18, NIV). As long as we hold on to bitterness, anger, or other sins, our prayer life will lack power. On the other hand, prayer that comes from a repentant and humble heart has power.

What does God want us to bring to him? Not our goodness or honesty, or the gifts he has given us. We must surrender our sins, our shortcomings, and our weaknesses to him. He wants to take them away from us. What does He give us in place of our sins? He gives us His righteousness.

Are there areas in your heart where the Holy Spirit wants to help you be purified? “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out” (Acts 3:19). Through repentance, we are cleansed of our sins. We must confess and renounce everything that does not honor God, such as following false prophets and teachers or practicing the occult. “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

We have been warned against deception and false teachings. “See to it that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name. They will say, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many” (Matthew 24:4–5). Deceived people are prisoners of the lies they believe. Lies hinder their relationship with God. If Christians follow deceiving spirits, they cannot follow God.

> **“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ as human, incarnate, is from God. Any spirit that denies Jesus is not from God. Such a spirit is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and is already in the world. You, my children, are from God and have overcome those false prophets, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:1– 4).**

1. If we want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we must forgive from our hearts, just as Jesus forgives us. “But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions” (Matthew 6:15). We cannot have a close relationship with God if there is bitterness in our hearts. Jesus says that our heavenly Father will hand us over to jailers to be tortured if we do not forgive from our hearts. “In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he paid back all he owed. ‘This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart’” (Matthew 18:34–35).

2. It is difficult to hear God's voice when our minds are tormented by the insults and evil words we have experienced. Some have hardened their hearts and seek opportunities for revenge. Others fear facing their pain or deny it and push it into their subconscious.

3. We must face our own pride if we want to cooperate with God. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 29:23). “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 18:12).

4. We cannot have a close relationship with God if He is against us. But if we humbly ask God, He is always ready to show us how proud we really are. Let's see how Jacob connects pride, the world, and the devil:

“And when you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you ask for on your pleasures. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘He yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us’? But he gives greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:3–8).

5. We cannot walk in the Spirit of God and be proud at the same time.

6. We cannot live and pray in the Spirit if rebellion dwells within us. “Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thy kingdom” (1 Sam. 15:23).

7. We must be subject to the authorities under whom we live, as long as they are in harmony with God's will. The same applies to our subjection to our parents as minors; likewise to our employers, church leaders, government leaders, etc.

> **"Everyone must submit to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except that which God has established, and those who exercise authority have been appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. Those who do what is right have no reason to fear the authorities, but those who do wrong do. So if you want to live without fear of the authorities, do what is right! Then you will receive praise from them. They are God's servants and work for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid! The authorities do not bear the sword in vain. They are God's servants and enforce the punishment that belongs to the wrongdoer. Therefore, you must submit to the authorities, not only out of fear of punishment, but also out of conscience. That is why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants in carrying out their duties. Give to everyone what you owe them: if taxes, then pay taxes; if customs, then pay customs; if fear, then fear; if honor, then honor" (Rom. 13:1–7).**

If we dare to ask God for his opinion of us, he will surely show us how rebellious we are. The question is, are we ready to humble ourselves before God and confess our rebelliousness to him? He wants to free us from it.

8. We cannot expect God to hear our prayers and give us the Holy Spirit if we consciously live in sin. Even if we try to hide our sins from others, we cannot deceive God. He knows our sins and wants to reveal our guilt. This is what happened to King David, and he suffered. Eventually, he turned to God, confessed his sins, and later wrote about his experience: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away. Day after day I cried out in

my anguish. Night and day your hand

pressed heavily upon me. My strength evaporated like moisture in the heat of summer. I confessed my sin to you; I did not hide my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my sin to the Lord.' You forgave the iniquity of my sin and took away the burden of my guilt" (Ps. 32:1–5).

9. We cannot pray effectively if we continue in the sins of our ancestors. Peter speaks of this. "You know that you were not redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your forefathers with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:18–19). Often our natural and spiritual inheritances clash. Love for Jesus can divide families if our earthly parents or children do not care about God. Jesus says, "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37–38). If we want to hold on to our spouse or family relationships by sacrificing our close relationship with God, we are not doing His will. In Old Testament times, the Israelites confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors. Nehemiah tells us: "Then the people of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers" (Neh. 9:2, NIV). People tend to live according to the models they received as children. "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). Whether it is a good or bad model, we often continue it automatically. No one can influence us more than our own parents during the first seven years of our lives. We live according to the beliefs and values that our environment taught us as children. If we want to break free from distorted attitudes, values, and beliefs, we must confess them to God. We are not guilty of our parents' sins, but distorted models hinder our growth as Christians and our walk with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus wants us to grow in faith and truth. "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. And my Father loves him who loves me, and I love him and reveal myself to him" (John 14:21).

Dear friend, has Jesus revealed Himself to you? Jesus says, “They know His voice” (John 10:4, NKJV). Do you know Jesus’ voice? If not, why not? Is there still something in your life that prevents you from hearing God’s voice?

There is still time to begin the work in your own heart! God needs people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Choose today to open your heart to the cleansing and healing work of the Holy Spirit.

> **"He is close to those who call on him, to those who turn to him in faith. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cries for help and saves them. The Lord protects those who love him, but he destroys the wicked. My mouth will praise the Lord, and all creation will bless his holy name forever and ever!” (Ps. 145:18–21).**

2

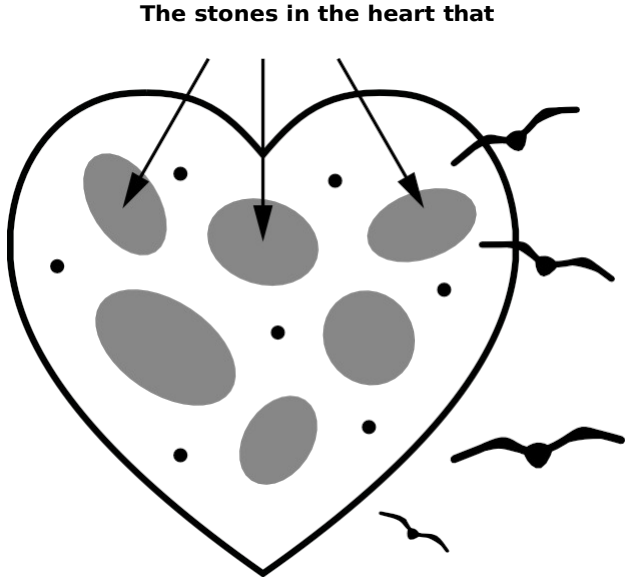
The Sower

“And he spoke to them at length in parables. He said, ‘A man went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the birds came and ate them. Some fell on rocky ground, where there was not much soil. They sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. But some fell on good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. He who has ears, let him hear!’” (Matt. 13:3–9).

“Listen, then, to what the parable of the sower means. Whenever anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the devil comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what the seed sown along the path means. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who, when he hears the word, immediately receives it with joy, but since he has no root, he endures only for a while. When tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns refers to a person who hears the word but does not bear fruit because the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke it. But the seed sown on good soil refers to a person who hears the word and understands it. These people bear fruit: some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold” (verses 18–23).

Using the analogy of a sower, Christ describes the kingdom of heaven and the great work we have to do in cultivating the soil of our own hearts. Like a sower, Jesus came to scatter heavenly seed, the word of God, into our hearts. Sowing seeds in the ground follows the same laws as sowing seeds of truth in the heart.

Seeds sown by the wayside



Birds – the enemy of the soul is ready to snatch the seeds of truth from the heart.

Stones in the heart:

- envy
- anger
- bitterness
- lies
- revenge
- rebellion
- pride
- desire to steal
- various desires
- sinful thoughts
- desire to criticize
- unforgiveness
- quarrelsomeness (James 3:14,16)
- unbelief (Mark 16:14)
- hardness of heart.

— The heart is hardened by sin (Hebrews 3:13, 15).

— The heart is a highway of pleasures and sins (Matt. 7:13).

— Selfish pursuits, sinful desires (Rom. 2:5).

— Spiritual abilities are paralyzed.

— One hears the word but does not understand it (2 Cor. 4:3–4).

— The mind is filled with worldly plans, a desire to judge, doubts, and unbelief (Heb.
3:12, 19).

— Does not understand his need or the danger (John 12:40).

— They do not understand Christ's love (Acts 28:26–27).

— The seeds are the Word of God. A person walks on the seeds and does not value them.

How can the stones be rolled away and the field of the heart tilled so that the seed of the gospel can sprout?

In His mercy, the Lord reveals people's secret weaknesses to them. He wants people to carefully examine their problematic feelings and the impulses of their hearts, to identify what is wrong, to change their character, and to improve their ways. God would like His servants to know their own hearts. God allows the fire of trials to afflict people so that He can reveal to them the truth about their condition and so that they can be purified" (E. G. White: Mind, Character and Personality, p. 617).

Meeri came to me for help because she was constantly crying. She didn't know why. Even the comfort of others didn't help. Since she lived about 300 km away from us, I invited her to our home for a week so that I could get to know her better. Meeri had chosen the easy way out. She wanted money, and to get it quickly, she started working in a brothel. She was young and beautiful. She sold herself for a good price. As soon as she got the money, it was gone. After a few years, her body began to react to this lifestyle. She became a girlfriend of a motorcycle gang. She worked there for about two years. In a clash and fight between gangs, she almost lost her life.

Emotionally wounded and feeling completely empty, she left everything behind and went in search of a new and better life somewhere else. Now she was living with a kind man. God had spoken to her strongly twice already, but she was unwilling to listen and change her lifestyle. Broken and poor in her loneliness, God spoke to her, saying, "This is the last time I will ask you to give your life to me." Pain had crushed Meer's pride, and she had no other hope left. He chose to accept God into his life, but he did not understand how. In this situation, God led her to me. We prayed together that God's light would illuminate her heart and mind (John 12:46). She saw herself in God's light as she really was, but still loved by God. When Meeri understood God's love for her and her own worth, it was easier for her to open the door of her heart to God. She deeply repented of her sins and confessed them to God, who forgave Meeri (1 John 1:9).

I asked God to free him from all injustice and evil spirits that he had acquired through his casual relationships. I also prayed that Jesus would wash him clean with His blood and give him a new heart, mind, and spirit (Ezekiel 36:26–27). At the same time, I prayed for freedom from all the chains with which the evil one had bound her, for "Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1; Acts 26:18).

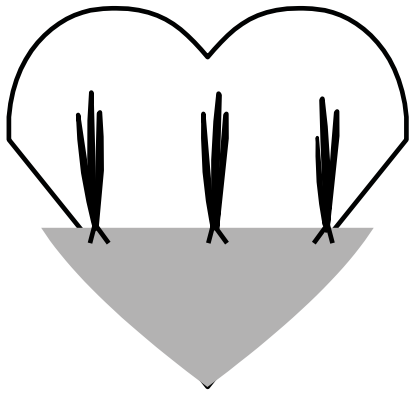
I talked with Meeri every day. Together we prayed for God's help, light, and truth in her difficult life situation. Meeri's crying stopped, and joy and love gradually filled her heart. A great change had taken place in her within a short time. Her heart, which had been hardened by sin, began to live a new life through the power of Ju- mala. A week later, Meeri happily left to join her friend. Many years passed, and I heard nothing from Meeri.

I was once at a church camp when someone behind me called my name. I looked back, and Meeri walked straight up to me. She told me that she had married her partner and had a son. Both of them were now believers and were living happily following Jesus.

A seed sown on rocky ground

"Is not my word like fire, like a hammer that breaks a rock?" (Jer. 23:29).

"The word of God is living and powerful. It is sharper than any double- edged sword, it pierces deeply and cuts through the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow, it reveals our innermost intentions and thoughts" (Heb. 4:12).



The rock of selfishness

The plows dried up in the scorching sun.

— Many who profess to be Christians are listeners like bedrock.

— Selfishness remains unconquered. They have not seen sin as sinful, nor have their hearts been humbled by the knowledge of sin.

— People may be easy to convert, but for many, faith remains only a superficial experience (knowledge on an intellectual level).

— They do not consider what God expects of them in His Word, nor do they apply it to different areas of their lives.

— They trust in themselves rather than in Christ.

— They rely on their good deeds and their own righteousness, like the Pharisees.

— They are not strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

— They accept the gospel to avoid suffering, not to be freed from sin.

— They acknowledge that they accept Christ as their Savior, but they do not believe that He gives them the power to overcome their sins.

— They do not have a personal relationship with the living Savior, and their character reveals both inherited and acquired tendencies toward evil.

The Bible advises:

> **“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance! The axe is already laid at the root of the trees. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. He has his winnowing fork in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out" (Matt. 3:8, 10, 12).**

Is my selfishness still strong?

— Do I trust more in my own strength than in God’s power? (Ps. 37:3).

— Do I have a greater desire to do my own will than God's will? (Prov. 30:5).

— Do I sometimes think that my own thoughts and opinions are better than those of others? (1 Peter 5:5, Proverbs 27:2).

— Do I sometimes consider myself more important than others? (Rom. 12:3).

— Do I pay more attention to controlling others than to developing self-control? (Gal. 5:22–23).

— Do I tend to think that I have no needs? (Luke 11:35)

— Is it difficult for me to admit when I am wrong? (1 John 1:9–10).

— Do I tend to please people more than God? (Gal. 1:10).

— Am I interested in receiving the recognition that is due to me? (Proverbs 18:12).

— Do I often think that I am more humble than others? (Proverbs 19:3).

"We do not belong to Christ unless we are wholly His. It is the half- heartedness of the Christian life that weakens people's determination and makes them vacillate in their desires. Those who try to serve both themselves and Christ will become like the rock and will not endure when they are tested" (E. G. White: Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 28–29).

An atheist man wanted to come for spiritual counseling because he was in distress. I told him that if I could pray to God with him, I would accept him. He agreed. During the prayer, God brought to his mind an event from his childhood that he had forgotten. His father had many relationships with women, and as a result, his mother hated all men. Because he looked like his father as a child, his mother took out her anger and disappointment on her son. When the boy was less than ten years old, his mother once hit him in the face. The act hurt the boy, and his father did not protect him from his mother's outburst of anger. He saw his surroundings through his experience of rejection and felt constant pain in his heart.

When he chose to forgive his father and mother, God began improvement work within himself. He chose to give his life to Jesus and began attending church. Within a few weeks, his wife and two daughters turned against him. I talked with his wife, but she wanted nothing to do

with God or Christianity. She chose to follow tarot cards and other suggestions from the devil.

In the end, the woman divorced her husband and moved away with her children.

His wife's rejection shattered the foundation of his life. Disappointed with his life, he began attending church less frequently, and his faith did not endure. In his loneliness, he did not seek God's help, but sought love and acceptance from another woman, whom he later married. The light of truth gradually faded in his heart because the seeds of the gospel had fallen on rocky ground. There was not enough good soil, and the seeds were unable to grow proper roots (Matt. 13:20–21).

Seeds sown among thorns

Thistles of sin grow in any soil and do not need to be cultivated.

Things that stifle the growth of the gospel:

- Distorted models, attitudes, and values passed down in the family
- A distorted view of oneself
- experiences of rejection
- Fear
- Greed
- lack of boundaries
- excessive stress
- workaholism
- pride, lust, bitterness, etc.

— Sowing on rocky ground means hearing the word, but the cares of this world and the lure of wealth choke it.

— There is no moral change in the heart, and the ways and habits of the former life are not abandoned.

— The strongholds built by the enemy of the soul, distorted negative emotions, twisted images, negative thoughts, decayed values, attitudes, family patterns, etc. (2 Cor. 10:3–5; Phil. 4:8; Isa. 26:3; Phil. 2:5).

— Unless the heart remains under God's constant supervision and the Holy Spirit is allowed to gradually mold our character into a more noble one, old habits will reappear in our lives.

— If we do not overcome sin with God's help, sin will overcome us.

— Selfishness and idolatry manifest themselves in our character; our hearts are not submissive to God, and harsh and rude traits and the pursuit of power constantly rear their heads.

— All desires that weaken the body, cloud the mind, or dull the perception of spiritual things are at war with the soul (1 Peter 2:11).

— The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim.

6:9–10). Are thorns still growing in your heart? (Jer.

4:3; Hos. 10:12)

Unto grew up in a religious family and had given his life to Jesus at a young age. He married a Christian woman, and they had two children. At first, life went very well. Unto had his own business, which he took good care of, but it took up more and more of his time. Unto believed that bringing home enough money would be enough for his family. He did not understand that his family needed his presence. His wife, in particular, felt lonely and abandoned. She felt she needed her husband's closeness, conversation, touch, and love. The children also missed their father's presence, his example, and his love. In Unto's value system, work and money came first. Despite many painful conversations and

arguments, Unto was not ready to change anything. He wanted to serve only his own kingdom.

Little by little, his wife had had enough, packed her things, took the children with her, and left. Unto still did not understand what the problem was.

I met Unto some time ago and talked with him. He was disappointed in God and himself. He had also stopped going to church and doubted the entire Bible. My husband and I tried to lead him back to God, but he was not ready for that, at least not yet. We gave him our address and asked him to come visit us. Now we can only pray for him. This is what can happen if we allow thorns (distorted values and a lack of true love) to grow in our hearts.

Preparing the soil

We must work hard to cultivate the soil if we want to reap a harvest.

— The results of sowing vary depending on the soil.

— The sower and the seeds are the same.

— We ourselves have the freedom to choose what we strive for in our lives.

— The Spirit of God wants to reveal to us the sin and the enchantment of the world.

— When we resist the Spirit of God and are indifferent to His word, we are responsible for the hardness of our hearts.

— We must cultivate and nurture the garden of our hearts ourselves.

— Deep repentance must break the soil hardened by sin.

— Poisonous, satanic weeds must be pulled out by the roots.

— Land overrun by thistles can be restored through diligent work.

— The natural evil tendencies of the heart can be overcome by serious effort in the power of Jesus' name and blood: "Clear away the thorns from yourselves" (Jer. 4:3).

— Jesus, the great gardener, wants to carry out this clearing work with our permission.

The task of the sower:

— To prepare hearts to receive the seed of the gospel.

— To meet people on a personal level.

— To show compassion like Christ and awaken people's interest in questions concerning eternal life.

— Teach the principles of God's Word to those who are starting on the path of faith.

— Assure them that salvation is experienced solely through Christ's sacrifice.

— Teach how we can make Christ's life our own and His character our own.

— Teach us to bear the burdens of our neighbors and leave our worries to God.

— Teach how to reject a selfish lifestyle.

— Teaches the blessings of working for Christ.

— Strengthen our trust in God's love and the ministry of holy angels (Hebrews 1:14).

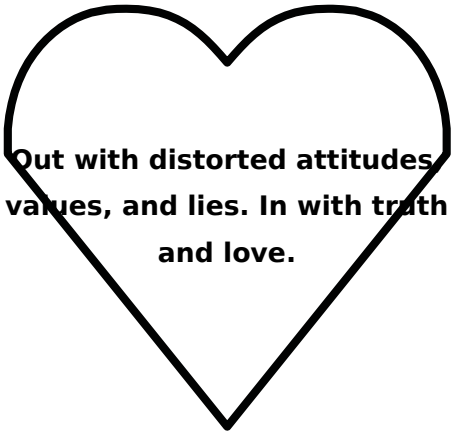
— Encourage people to win souls for Jesus.

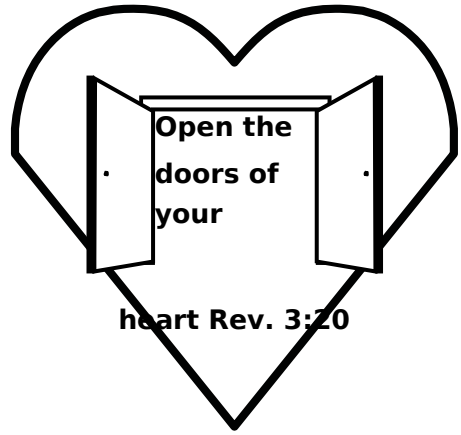
— Teach that when walking with God, the pleasures of the world lose their appeal and its burdens no longer weigh us down.

— Teach the truth about God and His Word, about ourselves, about the world, and about the devil.

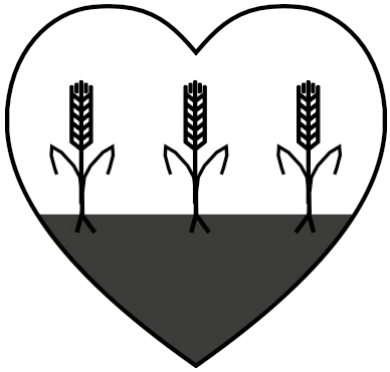
— Rebuke the unruly, love the depressed, care for the weak by being patient with everyone.

— Teach them to serve and care for others.





Good soil



The seed sown in good soil begins to sprout.

— A believing heart hears the word, understands it, and bears fruit.

— Good soil represents those who hear the word, keep it in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

— There is also sin in a sincere and good heart, for the gospel must be preached to those who are lost: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17, NKJV).

— The heart is honest and yields to the influence of the Holy Spirit, confesses its guilt, and feels its need for God's mercy and love. A sincere heart wants to learn the truth in order to obey it.

— A good heart is a believing heart that trusts in God's word (Hebrews 11:6).

— A listener who represents good soil receives the word—not as the word of men, but as it truly is—the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).

— A true disciple is one who accepts the Bible as the voice of God speaking to him.

— A sincere listener is willing to open his mind and heart to receive the word. Knowing the truth does not depend on intellectual ability, but on the sincerity of one's efforts and a sincere faith that depends on God.

— Angels approach those who humbly seek divine light and truth.

— The Holy Spirit is given to the humble to open up the rich treasures of truth.

— After hearing the word, the humble keep it in their hearts. Even with all his power, the devil cannot take it away.

— We are urged to fill our minds with the greatest and most sacred thoughts (the enemy asks us to empty our minds so that he can fill them with his own thoughts).

— A soul that dwells in an atmosphere of sincere thinking can, through studying the Bible, enter into communion with God and experience its influence in their own life.

— God created man to be happy and wants to fill the human heart with the peace of heaven (Phil. 4:7). He wants families on earth to reflect the great family above.

God's Word – a good seed

The influence of God's word is evident in behavior and character. An honest heart enjoys doing God's will. No one can rise higher than their own understanding of truth, purity, and holiness.

Can we still trust God's word today? I want the Bible itself to answer this question. For centuries, Christians who believe in the Bible have considered it to be the inspired, reliable, and authoritative word of God. They accepted the word with great enthusiasm and studied the

scriptures every day to see if this was true

(Acts 17:11). The Bible is the book that separates Christians from non-Christians. We have no right to judge God's word, but the word has the power to judge our lives and our character. Jesus himself said, "Have you not read in the Scriptures" (Matthew 21:42; Luke 24:25– 27).

- It is the book of the Lord (Isa. 34:16).
- God has spoken it (Rom. 3:2, KJV).
- It is the good word of God (Heb. 6:5, VK).
- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16, NKJV).

The Bible also compares itself to many material and spiritual things:

— God's word "lights my path" (Ps. 119:105).

— “When your words are opened, they give light and understanding to the simple” (Ps. 119:130, NKJV).

— “The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Prov. 2:6, NIV).

— God’s word is “a lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19).

— The bread of life (Matt. 4:4).

— The water of life (John 4:14).

— God’s Word is a mirror of our character (James 1:23–25).

— As we gaze upon His glory “as in a mirror, we are being transformed into the same image” (2 Cor. 3:18).

— God’s word is a cleansing and renewing power (John 15:3; Psalm 119:9).

— A burning fire (Jer. 20:9).

— A hammer that breaks the rock (Jer. 23:29). God's Word can break a hardened heart, which no other human means can do.

— A sword (Eph. 6:17). It can pierce our conscience, dealing a deadly blow to our pride and rebellious spirit (Heb. 4:12).

— “For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap” (Malachi 3:2).

— A seed (Luke 8:11) that bears good fruit.

— The word of God searches the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12, NKJV), teaching us to humble ourselves before it and

not allowing us to doubt, criticize, or judge it.

The Bible is the book of books.

The secret of the seed

> **Jesus said, "This is how the kingdom of God is. A man sows seed in the ground. He sleeps at night and wakes up to a new day, and the seed sprouts and grows, and he does not know how. The earth produces the crop by itself, first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And as soon as the crop is ripe, he sends out his sickle, for the harvest has come'" (Mark 4:26–29).**

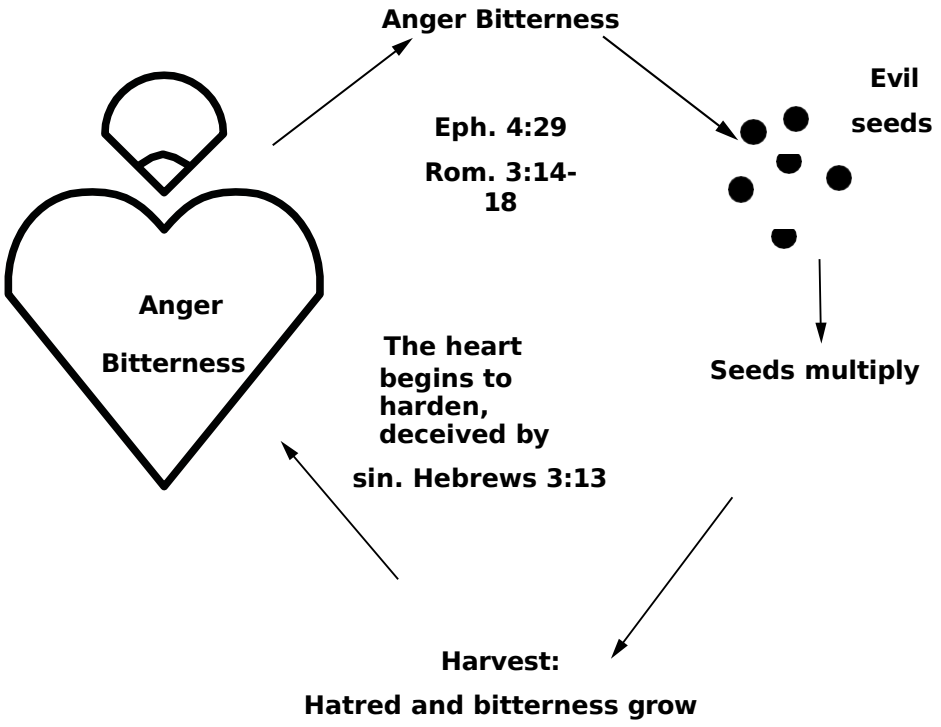
The parable of the seed shows that God works in nature. The seed itself has the ability to sprout, which God has put into it. Spiritual sowing is the same as natural sowing. The teacher of truth must try to prepare the soil of the heart and sow the seed, but it is God who provides the power that alone can produce life.

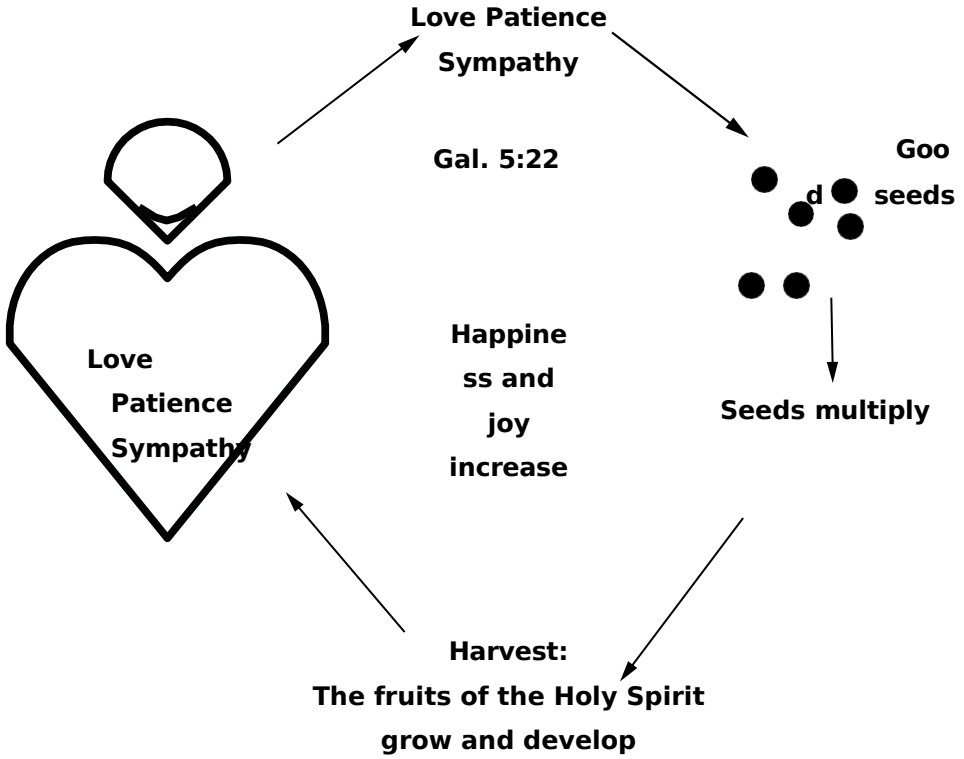
In your relationships with other people, what kind of seeds do you sow?

The seeds you sow (e.g., words or deeds) will yield a manifold harvest! Every good deed, word, or action will bless those around us and spread forward. Similarly, negativity (e.g., bitterness) is also a seed and contaminates those around us (Hebrews 12:15, VK).

Sowing both good and bad seeds will continue until the end of this world. When we share God's blessings, love, and sympathy with suffering people, it awakens happiness and gratitude toward God in the hearts of the recipients. All who want to bear fruit with Christ must first fall to the ground and die. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24, NKJV). We must die to our pride, selfishness, and interests. The law of self-sacrifice is the law of life. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you back again" (Luke 6:28). "Happy are those who sow beside all waters" (Isaiah 32:20, VK). The constant sharing of God's gifts wherever God's work needs them or where

human help is needed, necessary, and brings blessings to ourselves.


Anger Bitterness
Evil seeds
Eph. 4:29
Rom. 3:14-18
Anger
Bitterness
The heart begins to harden, deceived by sin. Hebrews 3:13
Seeds multiply
Harvest:
Hatred and bitterness grow


Love Patience Sympathy
Gal. 5:22
Goo d seeds
Love
Patience
Sympathy
Happine ss and joy increase
Seeds multiply
Harvest:
The fruits of the Holy Spirit grow and develop

“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Cor. 9:6). The sower increases the seeds when he gives them away.

> *I got to know a boy and a girl who both came from the same home— same parents, same education, same opportunities in life. The boy had a helpful, considerate, and generous heart. He did well in life. He was able to build lasting relationships and found it easy to make friends. “If you want friends, be friendly” was his motto in life.*
>
> *His sister chose to live only for herself. She did not care about the needs of others. She was not willing to serve anyone, but always had to be served. She was unable to build close relationships with anyone other than her husband. She had no friends. I tried a few times to help her have a better and happier life, but she was unwilling to change anything in her life or her attitude. Today she is old, sick, lonely, and poor. My brother is also old, but he is healthy and surrounded by friends. He has had great success in life. When we meet, I ask him, "What is the secret of your blessings?" His answer is, "By giving, I have become rich." This is a true reflection of the biblical truth, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Proverbs 11:24).*

Both of these people are believers. What a big difference our daily choices make!

The effect of sowing and reaping

“Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7; Matt. 12:34–35; Luke 19:22). “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life” (Prov. 10:11).

We choose the direction of our own lives.

> **“It is not what happens to us, but how we respond to it that determines the quality of our lives” (E. G. White: Christ’s Object Lessons – Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington D.C. 1941).**

3

We have been promised abundant life

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

The enemy of your soul has only one goal: to cause pain and destruction in people's lives. Do you enjoy your life? Or do you only rejoice in the fun moments? I believe that the presence of the Holy Spirit increases our satisfaction with our work, our free time, and even our waiting in various situations. In our journey through life, we must pass through both water and fire. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. I am the Lord, your God. I, the Holy One of Israel, am your Savior” (Isaiah 43:2–3). We can rejoice that God is with us. Our life here is a journey toward the future. We are allowed to enjoy the journey and rejoice in our destination.

The devil wants to rob us of our joy. He lies that we are only allowed to rejoice in a few things on our journey to heaven. In reality, we can enjoy everything we experience. If we have to wait for a late bus, train, or plane, many of us get nervous. Nervousness only takes away our joy and peace of mind. Life has taught us that when situations escalate, we don't have to go along with it. We can choose our own reaction.

Let us choose to enjoy our own lives! Life is wasted if we allow complaining, despair, bad moods, and criticism to control it. Jesus said, “I leave you peace. I give you my peace, not as the world gives. Be courageous, do not lose heart” (John 14:27). He promised us His peace. We are also responsible to God for our freedom of choice. We have the privilege of cooperating with God.

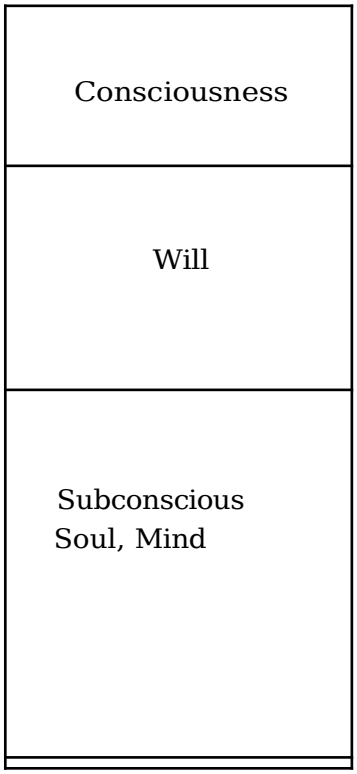
Some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, and peace. We cannot produce these fruits on our own! We may wonder why.

In order to grow spiritually, we need to ask ourselves three good questions:

1. Are there obstacles between me and God?

2. Are there internal barriers that prevent me from accepting myself?

3. Are there barriers between me and someone else?



Thinking: Forms mental images, collects, processes, archives, and defines things and situations.

Behavior: Will is directed by thought.

Emotions: Emotions are a combination of the soul and the Spirit. All the fruits of the Holy Spirit are emotions. What we feel in our hearts, we experience as our own. We know that we should love our neighbors, but it only becomes reality when we want to love and act accordingly.

“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7, NKJV).

Barriers between me and God

“And I will save them from all the places where they have been scattered on a cloudy and dark day” (Ezekiel 34:12, NKJV).

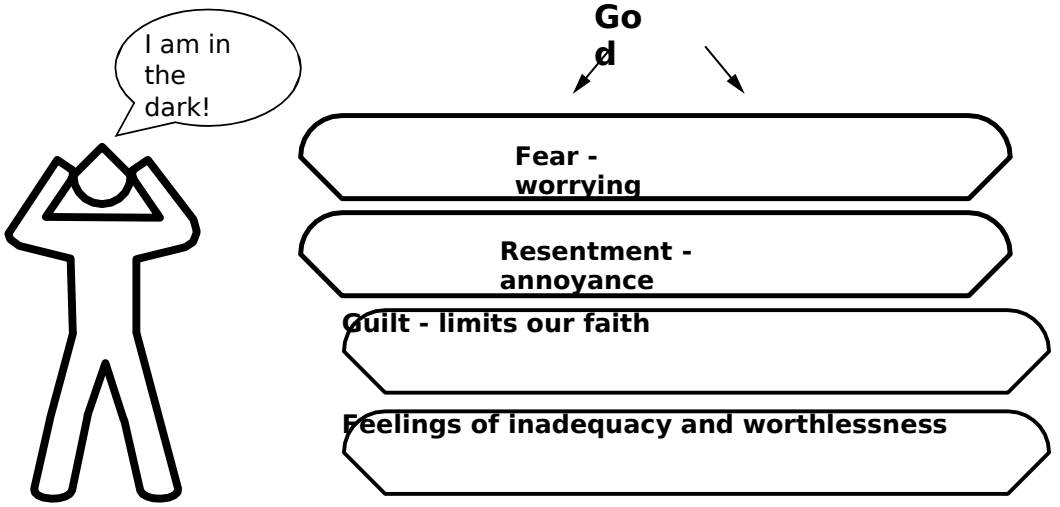
The following obstacles to knowing God are all emotional. They hinder spiritual growth, self-acceptance, and healthy relationships.

1. **Fear:** Healthy fear is God's protection for us. When we climb a high mountain, fear warns us not to fall and hurt ourselves. If we encounter a dangerous situation, fear advises us to flee or fight. Neurotic fear: Fear lives in our hearts. Fearfulness and restlessness dominate the present and the future.

2. **Resentment:** We feel bad when we see injustice being done to innocent people. It arouses feelings of fear and anger in us. Resentment disappears if we can somehow influence the situation. Neurotic resentment: Long-lasting resentment or uncontrollable outbursts of anger lead to feelings of guilt and disrupt close relationships. If you suffer from resentment, are you afraid of something threatening your life? Fear can be behind hostility.

3. **Guilt:** I did wrong. I confessed my sin, asked God for forgiveness, and He forgave me according to His word (1 John 1:9). I also chose to forgive myself and learned from my mistake. Unnecessary guilt: I have confessed my mistake to God. Nevertheless, it still bothers me. I may feel guilty about my parents' divorce, my adult children's wrong choices, etc. "For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been thrown down" (Revelation 12:10, NIV). The same accuser tries to accuse us of anything. We must learn to resist the accuser in the name of Jesus and in the power of His blood.

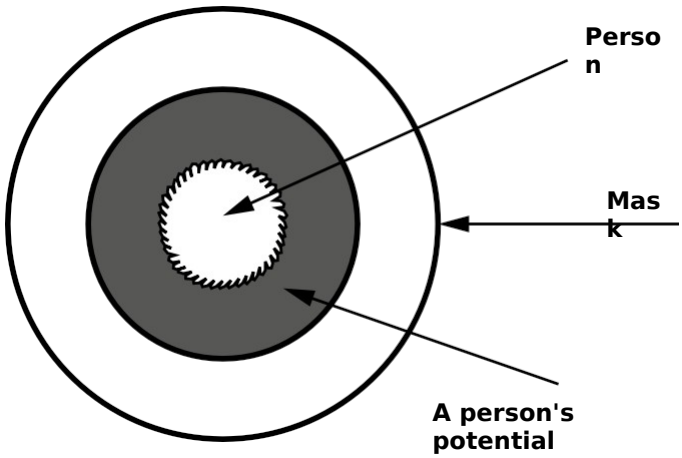
4. **Feeling of inadequacy:** We are all inadequate in some area of life. None of us can do everything. We accept that and do what we are inclined and skilled at. Neurotic feelings of inadequacy: Grow out of rejection and guilt and lead to feelings of worthlessness in many areas of life.



Barriers between me and God.

Jesus knew himself and surrendered himself completely to his Father's control and guidance. You cannot surrender yourself to God in areas that you are not aware of, do not feel, or do not accept in yourself. We must first accept and acknowledge our mistakes and difficulties, only then can we give them to God.

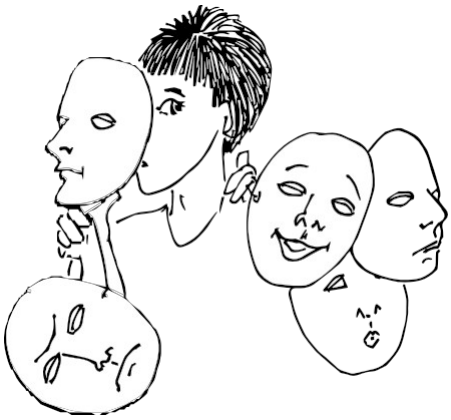
Barriers between me and others



Many of our difficulties are internal

Barriers between myself and others lead to tension in close relationships. It is necessary to assess the causes of our difficulties in order to resolve them.

A person is their true self. A mask is an outer shell that is shown to other people. It is safe to hide feelings of inadequacy and weakness behind it. Hiding behind masks weakens close relationships. It is difficult to trust another person if you do not know who they really are! Of course, masks can be changed, but behind them there is no growth in emotional life, spiritual life, or faith.



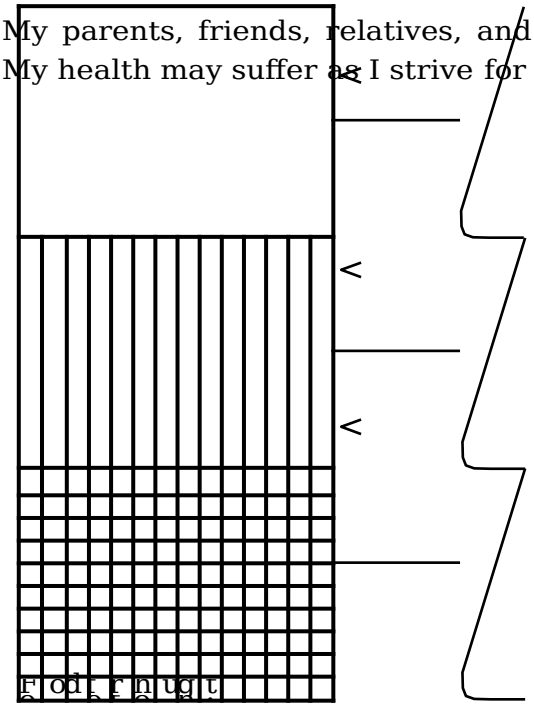
Masks do not completely prevent others from seeing us. Our true selves always peek through somehow, no matter how hard we try to hide them. They are more or less self- deception. Only a genuine person can relate to others openly. Many people do not know themselves because they are used to hiding themselves. It is difficult for them to distinguish between what is a mask and what is their true self. Everyone longs for acceptance, attention, and love. If we do not show it to ourselves, we try to get it from outside ourselves by various means. When we learn to accept our true selves despite our weaknesses, we can be honest and open in our relationships. Facing ourselves requires humility, honesty, and authenticity. It is challenging, but rewarding.

How do you hide your pain, inadequacies, fears, or weaknesses? Are you demanding, theologically rigid, controlling, angry, flattering, withdrawn, quiet, negative, overly friendly, or do you have a neurotic need to succeed in life or something else?

Unrealistic demands or expectations

Parents may expect perfection from their children by setting the bar too high. They also tend to set unrealistic expectations for themselves. Children transfer these expectations to God as well.

We easily compare ourselves to those who have more gifts and potential than we do.


My parents, friends, relatives, and my own unrealistic expectations.
My health may suffer as I strive for unrealistic goals.
This is as far as I can go.
My resources are sufficient for this.

From thought

— I shouldn't blame my parents. They were also imperfect sons and daughters who were born to imperfect parents.

— My parents did their best with the resources they had. Are my unrealistic demands a result of their unrealistic expectations of me?

— What kind of unrealistic expectations did my parents place on me that I was unable to meet despite my efforts?

— Does God expect me to meet His expectations immediately, or does He give me time?

— Is God already judging me? What was Jesus' attitude toward sinners? (John 3:17; John 8:4, 10–11).

— Does God place impossible demands on me?

— What do I expect of myself?

— How do I feel if I am unable to achieve the goals I have set for myself?

— Do I judge myself or feel guilty if I fail to achieve my goal?

— If I don't achieve a leadership position in life, do I feel like a failure?

— Since I can't get what I want, I don't want to do anything!

Remember the importance of the following sentence:

> **We cannot truly love others until we have learned to love ourselves. Hating, putting down, or criticizing ourselves poisons our lives. The same attitude is also reflected in other people.**

Our subconscious registers feelings of worthlessness and guilt when we are rejected. Children feel guilty when they are rejected. They think, *"I must have done something wrong, this is my fault."* Unfortunately, these feelings follow them into adulthood. If you have a vague feeling of guilt or worthlessness, your effectiveness is threatened.

Escaping from distorted thinking

God forgives us and accepts us when we approach Him with humility. He draws us to Himself (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Col. 1:22). We are accepted in Jesus, despite our own distorted attitudes. When God forgives us, He drowns our sins in a sea of mercy. Forgiveness requires deep repentance and a change of heart. The Holy Spirit comes to our aid in this. The key is that we accept God's forgiveness in Christ. When we forgive others, we accept the pain caused by the offense and the person who offended us. We cannot give up to God all the things related to the offense that we do not accept. He is a righteous judge and will reward each person according to their deeds. After this, we set clear boundaries for the offender and no longer allow them to walk all over us.

God accepts me, I accept myself	**God accepts me, I do not accept myself**
God ⇅	God ↓
• I accept myself. The darkness is gone. The battle is over. • I am able to deny myself and serve others. • I can admit, discuss, and share my weaknesses. • Everything I have is a gift from God. • I am humble and grateful.	• I am self-centered and constantly struggle with myself. • I want everything for myself. I always want to be the center of attention. • I live in fear, I pretend, I hide my inner feelings. • I have achieved everything in my life through my own efforts. • I am unhappy and proud. I look for substitutes.

If I believe Satan's lie that I am not good enough, I cannot accept myself. The lie is reflected in my life. The truth sets us free (Mark 12:30–31).

Internal barriers to self-acceptance:

- abandoned as a child
- unwanted child
- parents' divorce
- feelings of guilt
- adopted as a child
- experiencing the death of a parent as a child
- substance abuse in childhood home
- abused as a child
- self-hatred
- occult ties, etc.

“Let us lay aside every weight and sin” (Hebrews 12:1).

If we feel the need to compare ourselves to others (2 Cor. 10:12), comparison can easily become a trap that obscures our true selves. In competition, everyone gets hurt and feels like a loser.

What are people who accept themselves like?

- happy
- easily approach others
- open to love
- authentic
- accept themselves as they are
- able to laugh at themselves
- accept and take care of their needs
- live in reality
- are confident and courageous.

Thousands of people go through life without direction or purpose. They have not learned to value themselves. Jesus has paid the highest price for us and expects us to value ourselves accordingly.

Breaking down barriers

How do we deal with our negative emotions?

1. **Suppression.** We deny their existence. They are buried deep inside and begin to freeze. They do not stay there, but erupt as back or muscle problems and other physical problems, emotional disturbances, or poor relationships.

2. **Concealment.** We refuse to express them. It is important to try to control negative emotions. However, they must be dealt with at some point, otherwise their power will only grow over time.

3. **Expression.** Negative feelings can be expressed in a constructive way!

None of these three ways of dealing with them will solve the problem of these feelings. For example, even when hidden, anger is a powerful emotion. If you deny it, bury it, and try to forget it, it will have a toxic effect on many areas of your life.

4. **Awareness.** I need to be aware of my own feelings. Nothing disappears from our minds on its own; rather, when left unaddressed, it sinks into our subconscious (2 Cor. 13:5).

5. **Acceptance.** This does not mean that our buried negative emotions are acceptable, but we must accept their existence in order to deal with them in a constructive way (Proverbs 28:13; Psalm 32:1–5; 1 John 1:9).

6. **Surrender.** In your daily prayer, surrender all your negative feelings to God. Tell God, "This is who I am, and this is how I will continue to be unless you come to my aid." Tell God everything that weighs on your mind or disturbs you. Then you can let go of your grip on these things and leave them to Jesus. Often the devil will try to bring them back to your mind, but you must learn to resist the devil (1 Pet. 5:6–9).

7. **Behavior.** Recognizing, accepting, and surrendering negative emotions to Jesus helps you behave in a constructive way. Willpower, new behavior patterns, and emotions are closely related.

8. **Perseverance.** Surrender yourself to God every day. Give thanks for His mercy and accept His forgiveness for yourself. Ask Him to fill your heart with the Holy Spirit and guide you through life.

9. **Patience.** God gives you time to grow. He does not rebuke those who sincerely seek Him, even if they stumble along the way.

Be kind to yourself, just as God is kind to you. The closer you live to Jesus, the more clearly you will see your own weaknesses. You will also learn to recognize the dangers that lurk along the way. See yourself always under Jesus' protection, so that you can continue your journey with joy.

4

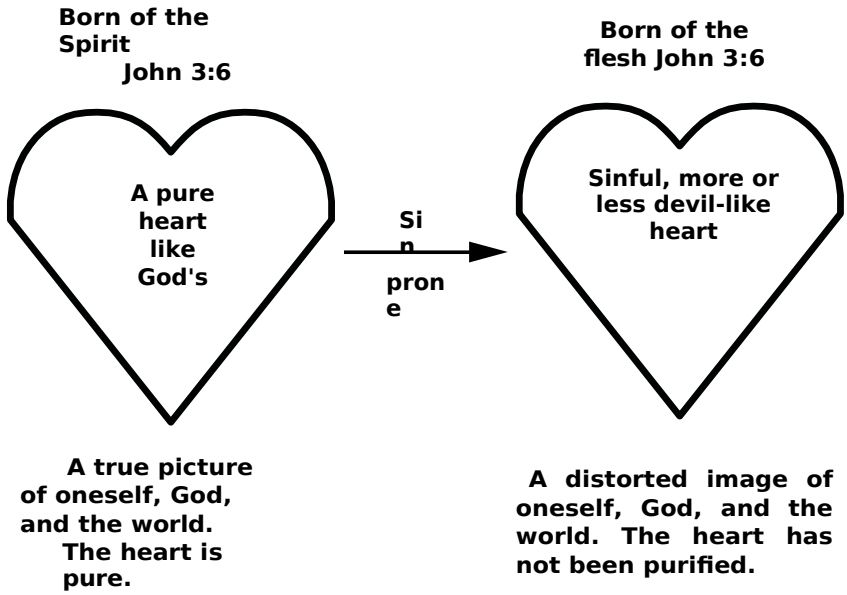
How to learn to understand the human heart

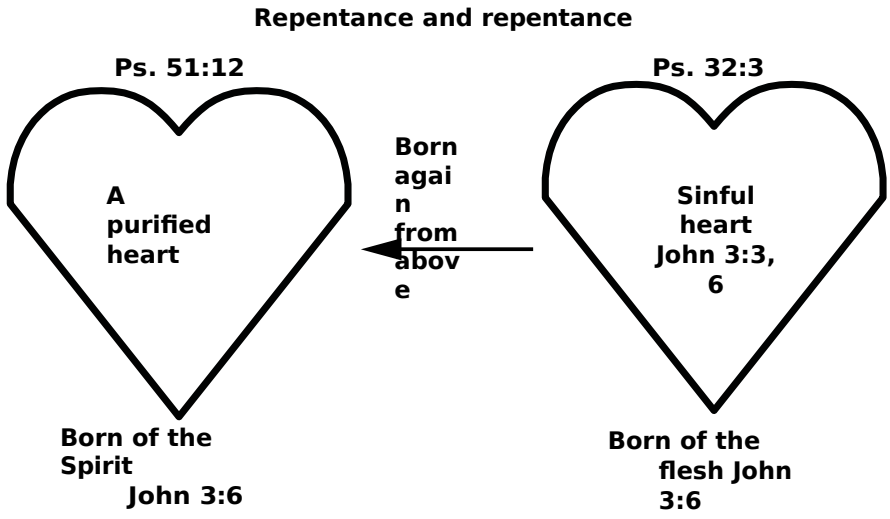
Are people good or evil? We all have two identities and natures: we reflect God's image, but at the same time we are the product of the Fall.

The Bible teaches that we were originally created in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). Every human being has an innate dignity given by God. God knit us together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13). “You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:6). However, each of us has a sinful nature because we have sinful parents. The apostle Paul wrote: “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God’” (Rom. 3:10–11, NIV). This sinful nature gives us a distorted view of ourselves, God, and the world.

We are the product of both creation and the Fall. Creation made us like God, and the Fall made us like the devil. The part of us that we feed in our hearts becomes stronger. “Those who make them [idols] and all who trust in them [idols] are like them” (Ps. 115:8, NIV). By looking, we are transformed. “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18, NKJV).

We all have a dual nature!


Born of the Spirit
John 3:6
A pure heart like God's
Sin prone
Born of the flesh John 3:6
Sinful, more or less devil-like heart
A true picture of oneself, God, and the world. The heart is pure.
A distorted image of oneself, God, and the world. The heart has not been purified.



The born-again person has confronted his own sins, repents, does penance, and believes in God's word (John 3:15). In this way, God recreates His image in us (Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20). “But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name” (John 1:12, NIV).

When we seek to help others with their emotional struggles, it is important to help them understand this dual identity of human beings. When a person is ready to face themselves and their sins, to repent and make amends, it shows that the Holy Spirit is at work in their life. Through this work, Jesus recreates the image of God in us.

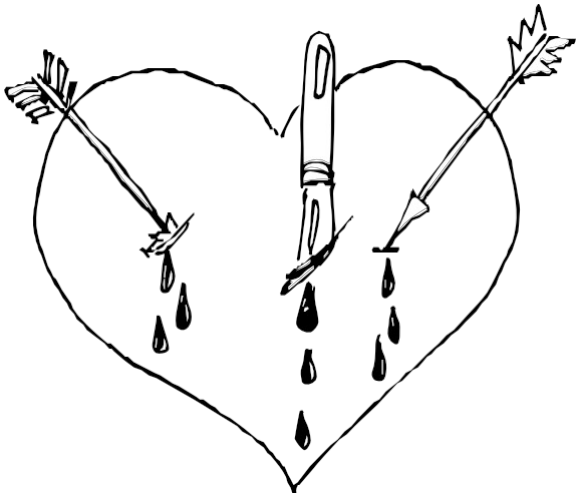
We all want to get to know ourselves and find our own identity, a clear understanding of who we are. This is made possible by a genuine relationship with God. “He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, who is our salvation, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13–14, NIV; 1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 1:5). God knows our need for love and acceptance. We can best help others find themselves when we walk alongside them for a while. Many people seek their identity through their work, wealth, status, hobbies, or something else.

Changing perceptions of oneself does not happen overnight. Even many Christians struggle with these issues. We cannot help or understand others more than we have learned to understand ourselves.

All Christians have been entrusted with the task of reconciliation and the message of reconciliation: “For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:19–20, NIV).

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24, NIV).



A wounded heart.

In this task, cooperation with the Holy Spirit is essential. The Bible speaks a lot about the heart:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt. 5:8, NIV).

“For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me” (Ps. 109:22, NKJV).

Angry words, rejection, and various degrees of abuse, among other things, undermine our self-esteem and cause deep pain in our hearts.

Our experiences are reflected in our lives in different ways: insecurity, lack of initiative, depression, loneliness, inner emptiness, anguish, feeling bad, etc. Such a person sometimes desperately seeks acceptance, attention, support, emotional reinforcement, etc. from their environment. If they are a Christian, prayer support is absolutely essential. A wounded heart is often codependent and seeks healing for its wounded self-esteem through relationships. It is natural to want support from others, but codependency causes clinging to others, even merging, and constant fear of physical or emotional rejection.

Loneliness, feelings of emptiness, and low self-esteem will not heal without

Codependency causes you to merge with another person.

God's help, but often leads to distorted, even violent relationships. God Himself has planted a deep longing for connection in our hearts. If we do not allow

our Heavenly Father to fill this longing, we remain orphaned. We drift through life searching for someone who could fulfill our deep need.

God is the healing balm for such a soul. God calls each of us to Himself, where we can experience the deepest satisfaction. The Holy Spirit testifies to our hearts that God is our Father and we are His children. “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of sonship, through which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:15–16, ESV).

When we know God as our Father, love Him, and accept His rule in our lives, we depend on Him instead of depending on other people. God himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5, NKJV).

Help for a wounded heart

Forgive everyone who has hurt you. Ask God to bring to your mind all your painful experiences, bitter and painful feelings, and memories. This way, you can individually choose to forgive each thing from your heart on an emotional level. If you have not been kind, patient, and loving toward others, especially those who have hurt you, acknowledge it and ask God for forgiveness.

Example of a prayer:

> *"Dear Jesus, I choose to forgive (name) who hurt me (issue and related painful memories). I give you permission to take away my feelings and thoughts of judgment, bitterness, pain, and suffering toward that person. I no longer want them in my life. I surrender all negativity to you and ask you to take it away, heal the wounds in my heart, and forgive me for my negative, sinful reactions. I choose not to blame others for their attitudes, words, and actions. I surrender my right to revenge for the losses that others have caused me. You, the righteous judge, will take care of my affairs. "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me." (Ps. 51:12, NKJV) Father God, bless my new heart and spirit in every way, in Jesus' precious name.*

* * *

> *The gift came to me because her marriage was falling apart. She had already decided to get a divorce. She was angry with her husband about many things. As we talked, it became clear that her anger was disproportionate. She admitted that she hated men in general. I asked her if men had done something to her that had caused her anger. She couldn't remember. Her mind had hidden her past experiences in her subconscious. We prayed together that the Holy Spirit would show her the roots of her hatred of men.*

The Bible says, "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees" (Matthew 3:10, NKJV). Hatred of men was the fruit, but what was its root? If we remove the fruit, the tree will grow a new fruit of the same kind. But if we cut down the whole tree, the fruit will no longer grow.

During prayer, the Holy Spirit showed Lahja that her grandfather had abused her when she was under school age. She was surprised by this, but gradually pieced together many small fragments of memory that had been stored in the recesses of her mind. She did not remember anything from the first eight years of her life until we prayed for her memories to return. We talked about Lahja's childhood a few times. She remembered the helplessness and pain she had experienced as a child, which she now released from her emotional life by crying. I encouraged her to release all the emotional baggage she had been carrying for so long. Then Lahja chose to forgive her late grandfather. I took her hands in mine and prayed fervently that God would heal her heart, mind, and body from all the injustice she had experienced. I also asked God to reveal Himself to her (John 14:21). I also prayed that the Holy Spirit would fill her heart with joy and peace, bless her children as well as her, and speak to her spouse.

The next time we met, Lahja's husband was with her and told us that the Holy Spirit had also touched him powerfully. He had been freed from alcohol and tobacco and was ready to give his life to Jesus. They began attending church together. I met them a few more times, and they told me how happy they were to have understood that they could give their lives to God and let Him heal them.

A grieving heart

"I have wept myself to sleep, my bed is wet with my tears, my couch is drenched with my tears. My eyes are dim with grief, my sight is dim because of my anguish" (Ps. 6:7–8). "Lord, be merciful to me, for I am

in distress. My eyes are dim with grief, I am exhausted" (Ps. 31:10).

Grief can remain in our hearts for many different reasons: the death of a loved one, divorce, misfortune, bankruptcy, serious illness, loss of employment, miscarriage, death of a child, poor choices made by a child, or infidelity of a spouse.

If sorrow, grief, and disappointment remain in our hearts, it is difficult for us to hear God's voice. Sorrow affects our entire physical being and also our spirit. It withers the joy of life. According to many studies, prolonged grief weakens the body's immune system and makes us susceptible to various viruses and other disease-causing organisms. It can weaken our heart, cause high blood pressure, stress, strokes, cancer, and is sometimes a contributing factor in suicide. Grief can lead to deep exhaustion, weakness, constant headaches, loss of appetite, digestive problems, and insomnia. People who grieve for a long time also typically experience depression, inner emptiness, guilt, anger, withdrawal, loneliness, and forgetfulness. Grief can weaken blood circulation and liver function.

Grief can settle in the muscles, spine, head, legs, stomach, or some other part of the body. That is why it is important to work through grief.

Our happiness in this life and the next depends on our choices and our ability to focus our minds on positive things. Don't dwell on the past, for example, convincing yourself that by letting go of your loss, you no longer love your loved one. Your own health will suffer from the long-term grief that has settled in your heart. If you have not grieved over a loss in your life, you can do so now, because your body carries the grief and remembers it, even if you do not want it to. Jesus wants us to be free. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1, NIV). He, Christ, is always ready to help, whatever our situation in life. Let Jesus carry your sorrows, your grief, your disappointments in this life, because that is why he came into the world. “Cast all your anxiety on him (Jesus), because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7, NIV).

1. Identify the painful sensation.

2. Try to locate the pain in your body.

3. Focus on the source of the pain.

4. Ask the Lord Jesus to take the pain away from you. You may need prayer help for this. In the Bible, God promises: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you! Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

I met Otto about two months after his wife's death. He didn't dare face what had happened, but ran away from it. He didn't want to be alone at home, but tried to be somewhere else all day. I urged him to look his grief straight in the eye and embrace his painful feelings. He said he couldn't do it. I took both his hands and prayed fervently for him. I asked God to help her embrace her grief. Suddenly, tears filled her eyes, and she allowed her grief to come with full force. I encouraged her to give permission for her grief to be released. She cried for a long time, almost half an hour. Then the crying stopped. She felt as if a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders, and she sighed with relief. I prayed for her again and asked God to take all the grief from her heart and nail it to the cross at Golgotha, because Jesus bore our pain. "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, from whom people hid their faces. He was despised, and we considered him worthless. Yet he bore our griefs, he carried our sorrows. We believed he was being punished for his own sins, that God was punishing and chastising him, even though it was our transgressions that pierced him and our wicked deeds that crushed him. He was punished so that we might have peace; by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3– 5). I asked God to give him a pure heart and a new, strong spirit. "God, create in me a pure heart and give me a new, strong spirit" (Ps. 51:12, VK). I thanked God for his great help in Otto's life and prayed for blessings on his life. The man left for home feeling joyful and liberated. He was grateful for the help he had received in his grieving. The gospel is still at work today.

A proud heart

"I will silence those who slander others; I [the Lord] will not tolerate a haughty look or a proud heart" (Ps. 101:5). But even greater is the mercy that the Lord gives. That is why the Bible says: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

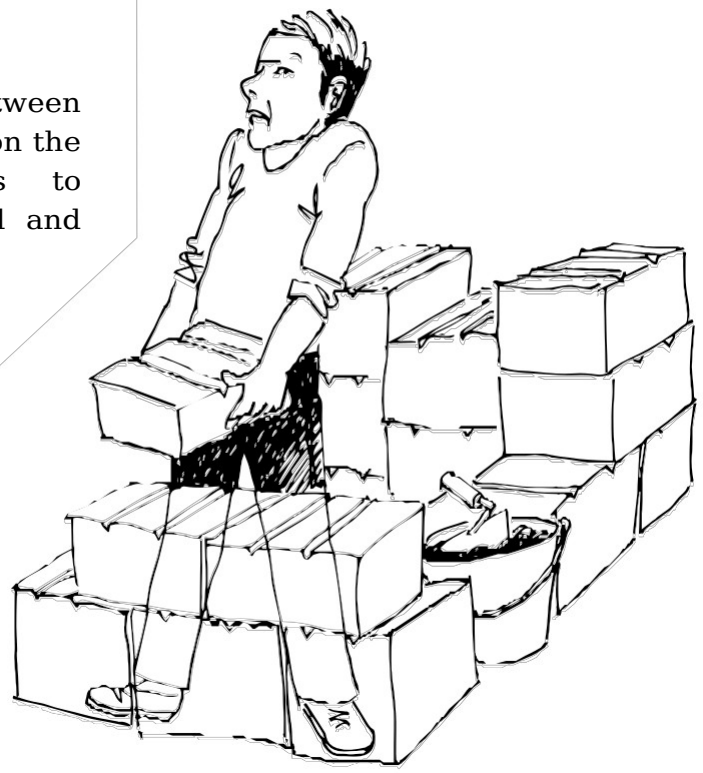
Pride was Lucifer's sin. It leads to death (Isa. 14:12–17).

> **You were in Eden, the garden of God, and you were adorned with precious stones, carnelian, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald. Your robe was embroidered with gold. Everything was ready when you were born. I [the Lord] made you a cherub, a shining guardian angel, and you were on the holy mountain, walking among the sparkling stones. There was no fault in you from the day I created you until the day you fell into evil. As you traded everywhere, you became more and more arrogant and fell into sin. So I cast you down from the holy mountain, I threw you, guardian cherub, from among the sparkling stones. Your beauty led you to arrogance, your splendor blinded you, and you squandered your wisdom. Now I have cast you down, exposed for kings to gaze upon and mock. You committed injustice in your trade, and with your many sins you defiled your sanctuary. Therefore I kindled a fire in your midst, and it burned you up; I reduced you to ashes and dust before everyone's eyes. All the nations that knew you are horrified at your fate. You are a terrifying warning. You are gone forever" (Ezekiel 28:13–19).**

Pride says, *"I can do it. I can take care of my own affairs without God or the help of others. I am better than others."* A proud heart does not want to forgive. This attitude leads to the idea that one does not deserve forgiveness either.

"If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. I mean those whose minds the god of this world has blinded, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Pride builds walls between people and is always on the defensive. It leads to rebellion against God and blinds the eyes.

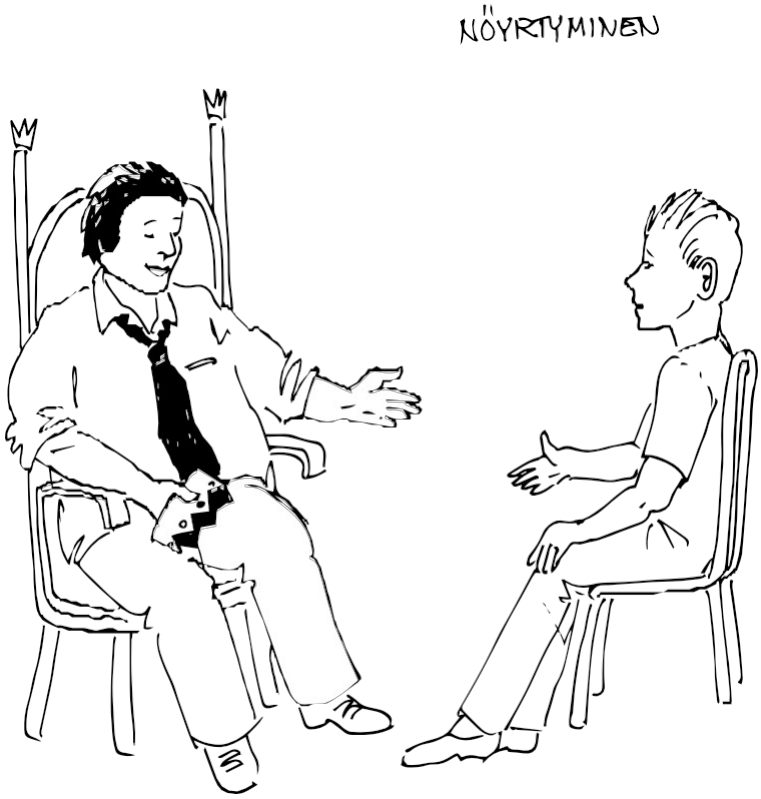


Outwardly, a proud person may even appear pious. “In the same way, you are pious outwardly, in the eyes of men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence" (Matt. 23:28, 25). Proud people think they have nothing to repent of because they can always justify their actions to themselves. Pride is fertile ground for the seeds of strife. “Pride only leads to strife, but whoever listens to advice is wise” (Proverbs 13:10). Pride shows that the heart is not submissive to God.

Behavior patterns of a proud heart: wants to be the center of attention in one way or another, behaves insensitively, belittles others, may be rude. The proud seek happiness, the ability to control others, admiration, and wealth in their lives. They should not be asked for advice, as it will lead to misguidance.

How can you get rid of pride?

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).



Humility is trusting in God and His word. A humble person thinks more about others than about themselves. A humble person looks for ways to serve others better. Humility builds bridges between people. Humble people are teachable and flexible. “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (2 Peter 5:5). We need humility in order to grow, heal, change, and help others. Humility is the key to reconciliation. The humble are willing to admit their mistakes and ask for forgiveness. “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4), “And whoever wants to be first among you must be the servant of all” (Matthew 20:27).

How can we learn humility?

1. **Admit your weaknesses.** “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

2. **Try to be patient with the weaknesses of others.** “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1–2).

3. **Speak well of others, not of yourself.** “Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own eyes” (Rom. 12:16). “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Do not be self- seeking, but be willing to sacrifice your own interests for the good of others” (Phil. 2:3–4). God guides the humble because they accept guidance and instruction in their lives. They sincerely want to know God’s will for their lives and follow it.

Sample prayer for freedom from pride:

> *“Lord Jesus, I confess to you today that pride dwells in my heart and that I have always thought only of myself. I have not been willing to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow you. I have believed the lie that no one else cares about me. I have turned my back on you, Lord, and have not allowed you to love me as you would have wanted. I confess that I have sinned by putting my own will before yours and by focusing my life on myself, without seeking you as my guide. Today, I choose to renounce my pride and selfishness. I give you permission to take them out of my heart and nail them to the cross at Golgotha, where they belong. You died for my sins so that I might live. I renounce all the injustice and lies that the enemy has brought into my life. Today, I give my whole life to you, Lord Jesus, and I*

choose to resist all the attacks of the devil.

with your power. Give me now a new heart and a new strong spirit. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, that I may fulfill your will. I trust in your guidance, in Jesus' name I pray.

* *

A Christian man came to me and wanted to know why the gospel was not working in his life. He complained that his prayers did not seem to rise above the ceiling. The man said he had fasted and prayed for several days, asking God to speak to him. However, he felt he had not received an answer. The man had never asked God in what areas he needed to repent. The Bible exhorts us: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19). Repentance is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Our task is to ask Him to show us our own condition before God. "Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

I asked the man if I could pray to God to show me what is a barrier between God and him. The man agreed to my condition. I prayed fervently that God would show him what was in his heart. After praying, I asked the man to close his eyes for a moment and listen to what God would say to him. The man's face became sad. When I asked him what God had said to him, he told me that there was pride in his heart. I asked him if that was true. He admitted it. I asked, "Are you ready to confess this to God and ask Him to forgive your pride?" He agreed, confessed, and humbled himself before the Lord. The man himself offered a prayer of repentance to God. Then I took his hands and prayed (1 John 1:9): "If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I also prayed that the sword of the Holy Spirit would completely free the man from the spirit of pride through the death of Jesus on the cross and the blood He shed on the cross.

blood. I asked God to fill the empty space in his heart with the Holy Spirit. I continued to pray: "God, if there is anything else in this man's heart that you want to heal in him today, show it to him. I pray this in Jesus' name." The answer came from God to his mind very quickly: "You serve food, not me." The core of the man's faith had been a strict vegan diet. It was something he talked about to other people. Again I asked, "Is that true?" He admitted it. He prayed again, confessed his sin, and asked God for forgiveness. I prayed again (1 John 1:9) and asked God to cut him free from his slavery to food. The Bible says (Romans 6:16), "You know that when you offer yourselves to someone as slaves to obey him, you are slaves to the one you obey. You are either slaves to sin, which leads to death, or you are obedient to God, which leads to life." I asked God again to fill this empty place in his heart with the Holy Spirit. As we continued to pray, God revealed the greed for money in the man's heart.

We continued working in the same way to free the man from this sin. After working for about two and a half hours, the man was tired but happy because God had begun to speak to him and many sins had been taken to the cross. "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered" (Ps. 32:1). When he left for home, he felt much lighter and better. He came back for a few more conversations until his heart began to beat solely for God. His whole life took a new direction. He felt called to help young people, especially men, find their way to God.

Freeing the soil of the heart from wounds and sins is a process. There can be many layers in the heart that need to be dealt with separately. On the surface, there may be pride and rebellion, as in the case of the man mentioned above. Underneath this layer may be greed, and underneath that, occult ties, unforgiveness, then fear, rejection, and at the bottom, conditional love. God wants to and can free each of us from our personal bonds and chains when we open our hearts to the work of the Holy Spirit. "He is my faithful protector, he is my fortress, he is my refuge and my savior, my shield, behind which I take refuge. He subjugates nations under my rule. Lord, what is man! Yet you think of him. What is a human child! Yet

you care for him” (Ps. 144:2–3; Heb. 12:1).

Have you, my reader, ever asked God if there is a barrier between you and Him? If so, are you ready to humble yourself and confess them to God and ask Him for forgiveness (1 John 1:9)?

We all want blessings in our lives. This requires humility, confession of sins, asking for forgiveness, and choosing a new path. “Dear friends, since we have these promises, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

God has reserved abundant blessings for us throughout our lives. We will only receive a few drops of them if we do not open our hearts to Him. Every lie, wound, or sin is an obstacle to receiving His blessings.

A broken heart

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:19). God wants to reveal Himself and His glory to His children. “Anyone who has accepted my commands and obeys them loves me. And my Father loves those who love me, and I love them and reveal myself to them” (John 14:21). God wants to fill our hearts, our homes, and our churches with his love and his Spirit. He wants to pour out the abundance of his grace into our dry and thirsty hearts and lives. He wants to ignite a fire in our hearts, restore our relationships, and rebuild the broken parts of our lives. This process begins with the humility of a broken heart.

No masks, pretences, blaming others or defending oneself will help before God, only deep repentance and acts of penance. This truth runs like a red thread through the Bible. Only through humility can we approach the Holy God. The same principle applies to close relationships. Loneliness, fear, the chains of sin, broken relationships, lack of communication, guilt, self-centeredness, addictions, etc. grow from the roots of pride. All of these can be broken through a broken heart, repentance, and humility. I hope you will encounter God in a new way and find your way to His heart.

When we give everything over to God's control, we no longer want to fall into the bondage of sin, but we want to live in the freedom we have received. "But in their distress they cried out to the Lord, and he saved them from their troubles. He delivered them from the darkness of death and broke their chains. He smashes bronze gates and breaks iron bars" (Ps. 107:13–14, 16). David understood that God did not expect outward piety and religiosity, but a humble, broken heart. "A broken spirit is my sacrifice, a broken heart you will not despise, O God" (Ps. 51:19). God can easily mold a humble and broken heart in any way He desires.

True brokenness of heart is a choice of our will. It is an attitude toward life and means breaking our own selfish will and surrendering it to God's will. We say "yes" to God without conditions, rebellion, stubbornness, etc. When our own will is united with God's will, then Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, can work through us in our environment. Then we humbly seek God's will from His Word and ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance in our daily lives.

Our relationship with God is reflected in our relationships with others. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

The life of a broken and humble believer is two-way:

1. **We are honest, humble, and transparent before God.** That is what it means to walk in the light. There are no barriers between God and us. The roof above our heads has been removed, and our relationship with God has been restored.

2. **We are honest, genuine, humble, and transparent in our relationships with other people.** There are no barriers between us and others. The walls we have built between ourselves and other people have been torn down. God has healed the pain hidden behind our masks. We no longer need to pretend.

Outwardly, the Jews—God's chosen people—were deeply religious. However, Jeremiah reveals the state of their hearts: "But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart. They have all turned away from me and gone their own way" (Jer. 5:23).

When Jesus came into the world, his words shocked the entire religious system of the time, because he refused to value only outward

appearances. He exposed people's hearts. "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, saying

‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men’ (Matthew 15:7–9).

Today we know that if we do not take care of our physical heart, it can weaken prematurely. We should take just as much care of our spiritual heart. We all carry with us our family history, which in most cases involves some degree of “heart disease.” Therefore, we must allow the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts. We cannot do this ourselves, because our own perception of ourselves does not always correspond to the truth.

Good news is contained in the gospel. Jesus, our great physician, has all the means to heal our deceived and sick hearts. He knows how to perform the necessary “heart surgery” and is able to transform our inner lives through the power of his death and resurrection. "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove the stony heart from your flesh and give you a living heart. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

The Bible repeats the same theme about the heart over and over again:

> **“The high and lofty One who lives forever, whose name is holy, says this: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with the brokenhearted and humble in spirit. I revive the spirit of the brokenhearted and revive the heart of the humble’” (Isaiah 57:15).**

According to this verse, God has two addresses:

In high places and in holiness

With the brokenhearted and the humble

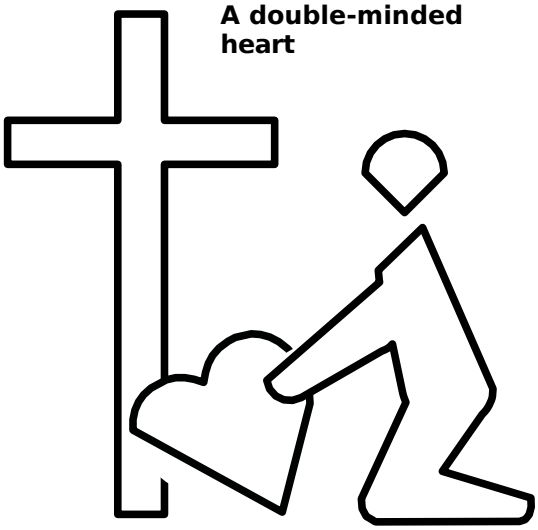
This is God's wonderful choice. Do you want God to live in your heart? He will gladly come if you are willing to give up your selfishness and humble yourself before Him.

A man came to me because his wife wanted him to leave their home. The man loved his wife, and they had a son. The reason for the rift was the wife's parents, who did not accept their son-in-law. The wife's parents tried to control the young family's life without taking their son-in-law's opinions into account. When the son-in-law tried to limit his in-laws' power in his home, his wife sided with her parents and drove her husband away from home.

I asked the man to bring his wife to talk with me. We prayed that the Holy Spirit would touch his wife and that she would agree to come. To our delight, his wife came to see me. She shared her perspective on their family life, but considered her parents' involvement in their affairs to be normal. Since the wife was a Christian, I read from the Bible: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Unless we detach ourselves from our own parents, we cannot unite with our spouse in a healthy way. I also read Malachi 2:13–16, Mark 10:7–8, and Ephesians 5:31 to my wife. These texts are written in the Bible because of their importance. The Holy Spirit opened my wife's eyes to see the matter from a new perspective. She broke down, confessed, repented, and asked her husband and God for forgiveness for her wrong attitude. The couple made peace in my presence and forgave each other. Then I prayed for blessing and success in their life together and for their son.

A double-minded heart

Truth and falsehood are partly mixed together, distorting thoughts, attitudes, and values.



The deceitful heart was taken to the cross

“Help, Lord, for the godly are gone; the faithful have disappeared from among mankind. They speak lies to one another, with flattering lips and a double heart” (Ps. 12:2–3, NIV).

“A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8), “A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8, NKJV).

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8), “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Clean your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8, NKJV).

“Out of the same mouth come sweet and bitter words” (James 3:11). Truth is found in God’s word, which He wants to plant in our hearts, because it also gives us life. “I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11). “But you desire truth in the inward being—teach me your wisdom” (Ps. 51:8).

As long as David lived in falsehood, he suffered. "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer" (Ps. 32:3–4). My strength was

sapped like heat in the summer" (Ps. 32:3–4). When he was finally freed from his burden after encountering the truth about himself, he wrote: "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Ps. 32:2).

Ways the world deceives us

1. **Wealth guarantees happiness.** “Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth. Here, moths and rust destroy them, and thieves break in and steal. Store up treasures for yourselves in heaven. There moths and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. For he who loves one will hate the other, and he who honors one will despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:19–24). “The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (Matt. 13:22). “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. In their greed for money, many have strayed from the faith and brought themselves much pain” (1 Tim. 6:10).

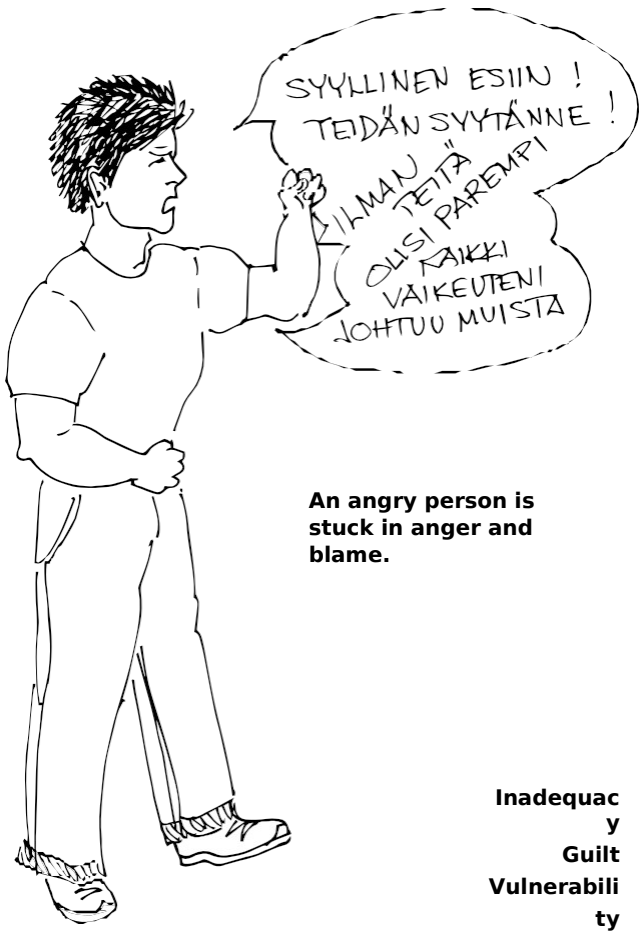
2. **The consequences of sin do not concern me**. “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).

3. **In order to be happy, I need the approval of certain people.** “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

4. **In order to accept myself and be content, I must achieve a certain standard.** “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

Wrong ways to justify ourselves:

- lying
- making excuses
- blaming others
- manipulating others
- rejecting others by withdrawing
- taking out frustrations on innocent people
- refusing to face the truth about one's own affairs.



An angry person is stuck in anger and blame.

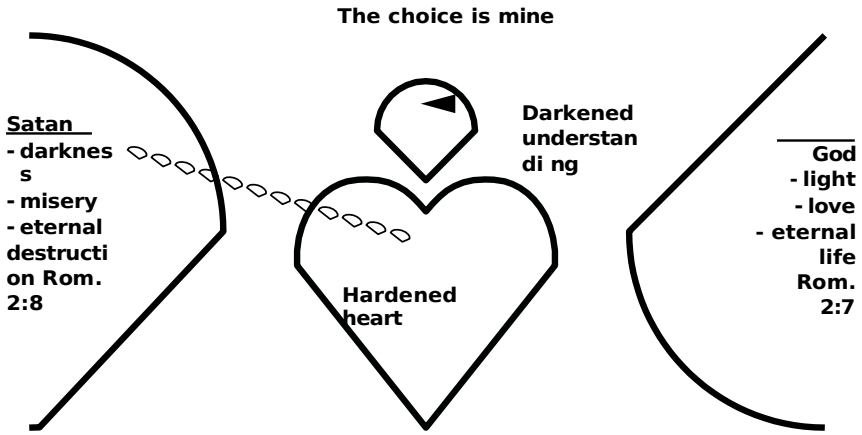
Inadequacy
Guilt
Vulnerability

A woman came to me. She was addicted to gambling and wanted help with her addiction. She knew the truth: "Gambling addiction causes more problems and you have to get rid of it." On the other hand, a lie whispered in her ear: "Try one more time, maybe now you'll win back what you've lost." She didn't have the strength to stop gambling. I prayed that God would reveal to the woman where the roots of her addiction lay. She remembered the pain she had experienced when her father abandoned her. She cried out her pain from her heart and forgave her father. I asked God to free her heart from all the chains with which the enemy of her soul had bound her.

I also prayed that she would be cleansed of all the lies of the enemy of her soul that she had believed and that she would receive the truth in their place. I asked for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and God's love in her heart. God heard our prayers and freed the woman from gambling and blessed her in many ways.

An uncomprehending heart

“Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21). “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good” (Ps. 53:1).



“Whoever is overcome by someone is his slave” (2 Peter 2:19).

Typical of an uncomprehending heart is:

- distortion of the truth in relation to God and oneself
- confused thoughts
- believing lies (Rom. 1:21)
- godlessness
- wrong thinking
- lacking a clear direction in life.

> **“The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5).**
>
> **“Their understanding is clouded, and the life that God gives is foreign to them, for they are ignorant and hard-hearted. Their senses have been dulled, and they have given themselves over to debauchery and all kinds of impurity and greed” (Eph. 4:18–19).**
>
> **“I mean those whose minds the god of this world has blinded, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4).**

They admire and serve something other than the living God! This results in impurity physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. When God is rejected, people begin to drift through life. Their identity as men and women disappears. Love is replaced by the satisfaction of their own desires.

> **“But you are stubborn and refuse to turn to me. You will be punished on the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. Then God will repay each person according to their deeds. To those who tirelessly seek goodness, glory, and immortality, he will give eternal life, but those who are selfish and obey injustice instead of truth will face severe wrath” (Rom. 2:5–8).**

Heart of stone

“And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit; I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them” (Ezekiel 36:26–28, NKJV).

Characteristics of a heart of stone:

- indifference and insensitivity towards others and God
- a critical and judgmental attitude toward others and life
- lack of understanding
- fertile ground for habits and behaviors that destroy one's own life
- dormant conscience, slumbering spirit
- covering up one's own sins and wounds
- self-centeredness
- isolation
- loneliness
- alienation
- anger and lack of control over emotions.

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23).

“Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness” (Ps. 95:8, NIV).

“By your hardness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2:5, NKJV).

God loves us and wants us to be free and happy. Every sin we hold inside us begins to harden our hearts over time. A hardened heart is a defense mechanism we hide behind to avoid pain and anxiety. Unfortunately, this usually happens unconsciously, and we do not notice it when we are before God.

The Bible warns us about a heart of stone and a rebellious, stubborn attitude toward God. “For disobedience is a sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as sin and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you as king" (1 Sam. 15:23, NKJV).

I have met Christians who have this spirit, and they themselves do not even realize it.

> **“Dear friends, since we have made such promises, we must cleanse ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, and in reverence for God [love] consecrate ourselves to him completely” (2 Cor. 7:1).**

A rebellious spirit, hostility, unforgiveness, pride, and bitterness are signs of spiritual impurity. A hard heart and a rebellious spirit usually go hand in hand. “A person’s own folly leads him astray, yet he blames the Lord” (Proverbs 19:3). Only God can replace our heart of stone with a heart of flesh. We can receive it if we choose to confess, forgive, surrender, and forsake all our known sins, follow the Lord, and believe the truth.

> *I treated a woman who had a heart of stone. She hated her husband, her children, and her entire environment. She was even prepared to destroy everything, even things that were important to her. I wanted to map out the woman's life in my mind during our conversation. I asked, “Does a rebellious spirit live in your heart?” She replied, “It haunts me constantly. I hadn’t realized it before, but now that you mention it, I can recognize it.” The woman humbled herself before God, confessed her rebellion and hatred. She asked God for forgiveness and chose to forgive her husband, her children, and others who had hurt her. As a child, the woman had had a difficult relationship with her mother, which led her to adopt unhealthy female role models. This was also the source of her disappointments and self-hatred. After sorting out the issues that had come up, she chose to forgive her mother. Her grandmother had died when her mother was a little girl, and as a child she had not been able to grieve for her loss. This left a void in her heart, which she tried to fill with a lack of love in her relationships, including with her daughter.*
>
> *Realizing that she had been carrying the burdens of*

previous generations on her shoulders, she chose to forgive herself. The woman had a need to control those close to her after experiencing harsh control as a child. Unconsciously, she continued this pattern. Gradually, her heart began to soften. The more the woman was ready to forgive others and make amends for her own sins,

The more she accepted Jesus' atoning work, the better her everyday life became. In just a month, he became a gentler and more pleasant person. God kept his word with him too. He gives us a new heart when we seek His will in our lives. "Cast away all your transgressions, all your sins, and take to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, Israelites? I do not want anyone to die, says the Lord God. Turn back, and you will live!" (Ezekiel 18:31–32).

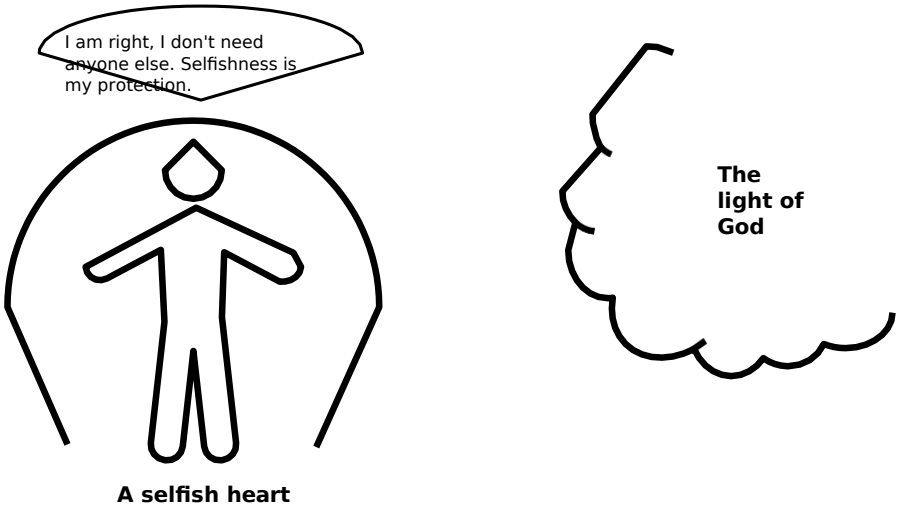
A selfish heart

"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11).

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12). A selfish heart believes more in itself than is reasonable. It has a strong need to be right. Hostility toward God blinds it from seeing its true condition.

Like Nicodemus, we may have flattered ourselves, thinking that our lives have been blameless and our character flawless. But when the light of Christ shines into our souls, we see how filthy we are. We see the selfishness and hostility toward God that has corrupted our whole life. Then we realize that our own righteousness is like a stained garment. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse us from the filth of sin and renew our hearts to become like him.

"One ray of God's glory, one glimpse of Christ's purity piercing the soul, makes every trace of sin painfully clear and reveals the deformity and deficiencies of human nature. Those who have been touched by God's glory hate their selfishness, abhor their self-love, and seek purity of heart through Christ's righteousness. They are in harmony with God's law and Christ's character" (E. G. White: Steps to Christ, p. 25).



A man came to me for counseling. His wife had given him an ultimatum about continuing their marriage. The man was quite self-centered. His wife was frustrated and wanted their relationship to change. During the first three sessions, the man had a lot to say a lot to say, and I couldn't get a word in edgewise. He had collected all the insults he had experienced throughout his life and repeated them. His painful memories had also affected his ability to work. His way of interacting with other people was very manipulative. During our fourth meeting, he opened his heart and his pain poured out.

Her violent alcoholic father had committed suicide when she was young. She had many painful and sad memories from her childhood, which she hid behind masks. He was ready to face many of the difficult experiences, feelings, and memories of his life. We took them all to the cross and asked Ju-mala to heal him from these life experiences. He was also ready to mourn his father. He chose to forgive everyone who had hurt him.

Gradually, the man's life began to change for the better. His energy was released as he was ready to let go of his pain. He returned to work and began to understand other people's difficulties as well. His own

tears

had washed his eyes to see the people around him in the right perspective. His wife and children also came to discuss their own difficulties.

Their family has grown stronger and more united. Love is given and received. God comes to our aid when we honestly want to work on our own shortcomings and weaknesses. "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand and say to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you'" (Isaiah 41:10, 13).

A consecrated heart

"May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (2 Thess. 5:23–24).

— God's peace reigns in the heart. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful" (Col. 3:15).

— God's word is hidden in the heart. "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11, NKJV).

— A righteous heart. "But justice must still follow righteousness, and all the upright will follow it" (Ps. 94:15, VK).

— A pure heart. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). "Truly, God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart" (Ps. 73:1, NIV).

— God knows the secrets of the heart. "If we had forgotten the name of our God and stretched out our hands to a foreign god, would not God have discovered it, for he knows the secrets of the heart?" (Ps. 44:21–22, NIV).

— Truth protects. “I will not hide your righteousness in my heart; I will speak of your faithfulness and your help. I will not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the great assembly” (Ps. 40:11, NIV).

— God is sanctified in the heart. “But sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15, NKJV).

“Through the Spirit, believers become partakers of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power with which we can overcome all our inherited and acquired tendencies toward evil. This is how He reveals His character to the church” (E. G. White: My Life Today, p. 11).

“Because His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness, through His knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence, through whom he has given us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires" (2 Peter 1:3–4, NIV). “But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name” (John 1:12, NKJV).

“Those who proclaim the truth must also live by its principles. As you reflect God’s character in righteousness, nobility, and unselfishness, your own life will serve as an effective example to others” (E. G. White, Education, p. 41).

God seeks people who have sincere and pure hearts. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8, NKJV). A person with a pure heart serves God with all his heart. David explains what a pure heart means: “You desire truth in the innermost being; you teach me wisdom in my secret heart” (Ps. 51:8, NIV). God sees deep into our hearts; he knows everything about us. A pure heart is also the result of reorienting our thinking. “Do not conform to the pattern of this world,

but be transformed

be renewed in your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, pleasing, and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

The following arise from our way of thinking:

Values Motives Attitudes Emotions Thoughts Words

It took me a long time to understand that God cannot bless actions that arise from wrong motives or an impure heart. A pure heart does not come automatically to anyone. It requires conscious effort to obtain one. "It is God's will that you should be sanctified. Avoid sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). This exhortation challenges us. God himself helps us through his Holy Spirit.

We are created to be dependent on God. His desire is that we bring all the challenges of our lives to him and allow him to help us. He alone knows what is hidden in our hearts. He wants to free and heal us internally: to remove everything that is worthless and restore everything that is valuable.

A pure heart comes at a price. It does not come for free, but working toward it is rewarding and brings quality to our inner life. Our task is to consent to God's process of inner purification. It can be painful when we discover the truth about God, ourselves, the world, and the devil. The truth changes us internally. God's abundant blessings follow this process.

If you choose to purify your heart today, you can pray as follows:

> *"Dear God! I truly desire a closer relationship with you. Today, I choose to give my heart to you and consent to the work of the Holy Spirit in my heart. I confess that I have often chosen my own way against your will. I ask that you forgive my sins and show me what I need to let go of in my heart. Show me whom I need to forgive and whom I need to ask for forgiveness. Give me the strength to let go of everything that is contrary to your will.*

Thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross for me and paying for my sins. Come live in my heart and be my Savior and Lord. Change my inner life and make me the person you designed me to be. Heal all my deep wounds and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. Build in me a deep faith and trust in your fatherly guidance. I pray all this in the holy name of Jesus.

The moment you choose to give your life to God and believe that He is your Savior, He will come to live inside you. He will give you His power to live the life He has planned for you. God will also give you peace and heal you from your wounds. "You have brought me out of danger; you are my rock. My God, I take refuge in you; you are my rock, my fortress, my deliverer" (Psalm 18:3).

Hearts closed and open to the influence of the Holy Spirit

Worldly values:

- self-centeredness
- lack of empathy
- desire to be the center of attention
- low self-esteem
- blindness and deafness to the gospel
- bound freedom
- need to control
- suffocating close relationship
- difficulty receiving love.

"But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, to the unbelievers, whose minds the god of this world has blinded, so that they cannot see the light that shines from the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:3–4, NIV).

Heavenly values in life:

- a heart full of love
- Knowing God and oneself
- happiness and willingness to serve
- security
- Love for God, others, and oneself
- understanding and inviting love
- Hearing God's word and applying it to life.

“Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and acts on them—I will show you who he is like” (Luke 6:47, NIV).

“But he said, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it’” (Luke 11:28, NIV).

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, which shines on the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that the immense power may be from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:6–7, NIV).

"... nor will they say, 'Look, here it is,' or 'There,' for behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21, NKJV).

Our value is measured by the cross. God created us perfectly beautiful; He does not make junk!

An open and closed heart

If we have a closed heart and want an open heart instead, we must dare to evaluate ourselves honestly. Honest self-examination is safest with God's grace. It reveals our own delusions. When we dare to look at ourselves truthfully, healing can begin.

“But the tax collector stood at a distance and would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner’” (Luke 18:13, NIV). The tax collector considered himself a sinner, a bad man. Other people agreed. He felt his need, his guilt, and his shame, and asked God for mercy. His heart was open, and the Spirit of God was able to do His work of mercy by freeing him from sin and guilt.

The Pharisee's arrogant, self-righteous prayer showed that his heart was closed to the Holy Spirit. He was far from God, unaware of his sinfulness, and did not understand his personal needs. He was unable to receive anything from God.

> **“Many prodigal sons remain outside the kingdom of God because of the behavior of careless people who call themselves Christians. Envy, jealousy, pride, harsh feelings, self-righteousness, irritability, evil thoughts, harshness, coldness, lack of sympathy—these are all the work of Satan” (E. G. White: Mind, Character, and Personality, p. 192).**

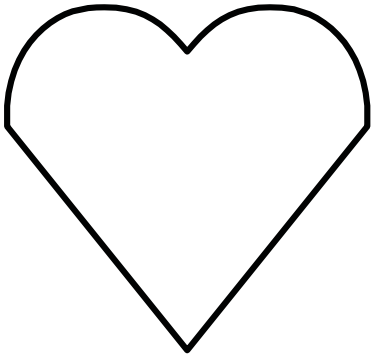
We can choose to be wise virgins and open our hearts to God. In this way, we can let His light shine within us and allow the Holy Spirit to show us what we should do. When we allow Him to do His healing work in us, we can truly rejoice in the Lord.

The following qualities will help us open our hearts to our family, friends, other church members, etc. They will also help heal a wounded heart:

Unconditional
love Kindness
Consideration
for others

Kindness

Patience
Affection
Joy
Understanding
Encouragement

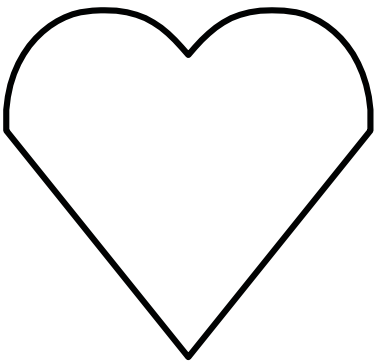


Kindness
Trust
Equality
Humility
Mercy
Gentleness
Forgiveness
Self- control

“Contemplating the love of Christ purifies our hearts, elevates our thoughts, and transforms our character. Through Christ, we can shine as a light to the world and reflect the love we have received from Him” (E. G. White: The Desire of Ages, p. 661).

The following characteristics close our hearts to those around us:

Anger
Irritabil
ity
Criticis
m
Controlling
others
Demandingne
ss Violence
Impatience
Cynicism
Suspicion
Negativity
Frustration



Fears
Pride
Selfishn
ess
Unforgiveness
Need to be right
Distrust
Superiority
Prejudice
Accusations
Rudeness

> **“Every impure thought defiles the soul, weakens the morals, and hinders the work of the Holy Spirit. Impure thoughts dim spiritual vision and connection with God. God can and will forgive the repentant, but sin always damages the soul. Impurity of speech and thought can be avoided if spiritual truths influence our judgment” (E. G. White: Desire of Ages, pp. 301–302).**

If you are aware of your sinfulness, do not expect to be able to heal yourself. Only God can help us. We must come before Christ just as we are. The love, suffering, and death of God's Son testify to the omnipresent existence of sin. There is no hope for a better life unless we are willing to give our souls to Christ. There is no reason to put off confessing our sins and seeking a pure heart in Jesus. What we do not conquer will conquer us.

> **"Every sin, every act of indifference to God's mercy and rejection of Christ is our own choice. The result is a hardening of the heart, a corruption of the will, a clouding of the understanding of God's word, and a weakening of our surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts" (E. G. White: Steps to Christ, p. 32).**

Many accept an intellectual religion, a form of godliness, where the heart is not purified. “But know this, that in the last days there will come difficult times. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, loveless, unfriendly, slanderers, unrestrained, brutal, enemies of the good, traitors, violent, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; they have a form of godliness but deny its power. Avoid such people” (2 Tim. 3:1–5, VK). “God, create in me a pure heart and give me a new strong spirit” (Ps. 51:1, VK).

> **“No wonder even the truth does not melt hearts, for it is presented in a cold and lifeless manner” (E. G. White: Gospel Worker, p. 157).**

Filthy “clothes”

— Every sin that we do not reject and give to God defiles and pollutes our “clothes.”

— Defending ourselves:

- Refusal to face the negative things we experience
- Escaping reality: codependency, unrealistic dreaming, substance abuse, etc.
- Withdrawal, rejecting others to avoid rejection
- Taking out frustrations on other people
- Blaming others for one's own problems
- Making up and looking for excuses for one's own thoughts and reactions
- Lying to others and oneself

Every Christian should learn that Jesus is the only defender we need. If we have been misled, we can confess it like this:

> *“Lord Jesus, I admit that I have been misled (name the issue). I choose to commit myself only to knowing you and following your truth. I trust that you will defend me. I ask this in your name.”*

— The lies we believe. God's power is in the truth: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). "Against you, you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You are right to rebuke me, and you are justified in your judgment” (Ps. 51:6).

Satan's power is in lies!

> **“You are from Satan. He is your father, and you want to do what he wants. Satan has been a murderer from the beginning. He is far from the truth; it is foreign to him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).**

Those who believe in Christ have no right to deceive or mislead by lying (not even white lies), exaggerating, distorting the truth, or in any other way falsifying the truth. Satan is the father of lies and seeks people to bind them through deception.

> **“But keep away from irreverent and empty talk, for those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly, and their teaching will spread like a cancer. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have strayed from the truth by saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they are corrupting the faith of many. Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. And they will escape the snare of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:16–19, 26, NKJV).**

— We acquire attitudes, beliefs, values, and emotional and behavioral patterns from our homes and surroundings. Only the Holy Spirit can help us see the truth and grow out of our own biases.

The masks we wear

Masks form a facade behind which we hide to cover our shortcomings or shame (fig leaves, Genesis 3:7).

The achiever

> The achiever feels pressure to prove that he is good enough. He is unable to relax and rest. He performs in life and wants to accomplish something. They feel responsible for almost everything that happens around them. They are driven to perform by, among other things, the fear of being rejected and abandoned.

The lie that the achiever believes: *"You must meet the expectations that you set for yourself and that others set for you."*

This is often a pattern learned from family or childhood. The child has been given too much responsibility too early and has not been able to experience the carefree nature of childhood. The achiever must learn to realize that other people and God can love him even if he is not constantly doing something. “Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand and say to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you’” (Isaiah 41:10, 13, NIV).

The critic

> What a critic hates in himself, he finds and criticizes in others. Often his father also had anger and hatred in his heart, and these traits have rubbed off on him. And even though he hates his father and his father's anger, these feelings rub off on him subconsciously.

A lie that critics believe: *"Don't forgive—hold a grudge. You have every right to."*

The critic must forgive himself and others for not being perfect. "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1, KJV). "Wherefore thou, O man, cannot justly judge another, whatsoever thou art, that judgest. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you who judge do the same things" (Rom. 2:1, NIV). "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15, NKJV).

The braggart

> The braggart bolsters his weak self-esteem by often exaggerating the truth. He wants attention from others.

The lie that the braggart believes: *"I am not good enough, and therefore I am not worthy of love. To get love and attention, I have to exaggerate the truth."* The braggart must acknowledge the lie he believes and learn to trust and be honest. The assurance of reconciliation with God enlightens our minds and calms our hearts. The hope of eternal life based on Christ's atoning work and the blessing of others bring joy and can bring love and happiness into the life of the braggart. "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph. 1:4, NIV). "He saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Tim. 1:9, NKJV).

Victims

> The victim has usually been deeply hurt in early childhood and has therefore received a lot of sympathy (being a victim is a childhood pattern). The victim does not feel worthy of love and support from others without suffering. They feel powerless over their own lives and try to control the people around them by making them feel guilty.

The lie that the victim believes: *"By talking about my suffering and pain, I will receive sympathy, attention, and love."*

The victim must learn to become stronger and take responsibility for their own life, expressing their anger in a safe environment and learning to forgive others. “For I will restore health to you and heal you of your wounds, says the Lord, you who are called ‘forsaken,’ ‘the one no one cares for,’ Zion” (Jer. 30:17, VK). “See, I will restore and heal [Israel] and cure them, and I will bring them peace and truth in abundance” (Jer. 33:6, VK). “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13, VK).

The Sacrificer

> The martyr has learned that love means sacrifice or giving up something for others. Perhaps the martyr’s parents did not allow their child to forget how much they gave up for him or her and how they expect the same behavior in return.

The lie that the self-sacrificer believes: *“Suffering is a virtue and a sign of true love. I have suffered for you, now you must suffer for me.”*

For the self-sacrificing person, love is burdensome because in order to show love, they must always do something they do not want to do or give up something they want to keep. The self-sacrificing person needs healing from the suppressed anger and resentment toward their parents and others that fills their heart. Their task is to forgive them for placing a heavy burden on them and making them feel guilty.

The sacrificer must learn to accept God's gift of love freely. Love gives joyfully, not out of obligation. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV). “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30, NIV). “The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:39, NIV).

“When interacting with others, let us always remember that there are chapters in their life experiences that are hidden from view. Sad stories are written in the books of heaven, protected from prying eyes. The books record long and arduous struggles in trying circumstances; homes where, day after day, courage, faith, and trust are drained away until even humanity itself seems to fade into oblivion. But Jesus knows everything, and he does not forget these struggles. For such a person, a kind and gentle word is as welcome as an angel's smile. A strong, helping handshake from a true friend is more valuable than gold and silver. Kindness, love, and consideration are the hallmarks of a believer” (E. G. White: My Life Today, p. 178).

Attention seeker (show-off)

The attention seeker believes that wealth compensates for the areas of life in which he or she is unable to be authentic. He or she seeks to bolster a weak sense of self-worth with material possessions, hoping that this will bring the attention and recognition he or she craves. The money they value can become a substitute for God, whom the attention seeker serves. They fear that without money, they cannot receive love and acceptance. He is proud and tries in one way or another to replace the love he desires with money. He is unable to openly show his feelings, but instead gives others something material or withholds it from them.

The lie that the attention seeker believes: *"When I have money and possessions, I will receive a lot of love and acceptance."*

The attention seeker must learn to express their feelings to a trusted friend and let others see who they really are inside.

“Whatever the devil plants in our hearts—envy, jealousy, evil thoughts, evil speech, impatience, prejudice, selfishness, lust, and vanity—we must pull up by the roots. If these evils are allowed to remain in the soul, they will bear fruit that will corrupt many people. How many people nurture poisonous plants in their hearts that stifle the precious fruits of love and pollute the soul. Only the love that flows from the heart of Christ can heal. Only he in whom love flows like sap in a tree or blood in a body can heal a wounded soul” (E. G. White: My Life Today, p. 179).

Lonely

At some point in life, a lonely person has not received the recognition and love they long for. They have decided that they no longer need it. The easiest solution for a lonely person is to avoid relationships and live alone.

The lie that lonely people believe: *“Needing others is a sign of weakness. So I don’t need anyone!”*

A lonely person has detached themselves from their feelings, because honestly acknowledging them would be too painful. They must learn to honestly communicate their needs and wounds and openly reveal their secret expectations and disappointments to someone. "In God is my help and my glory. My strength is the rock of my salvation, my refuge is God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts before him. God is our refuge. Selah” (Ps. 62:8–9, VK).

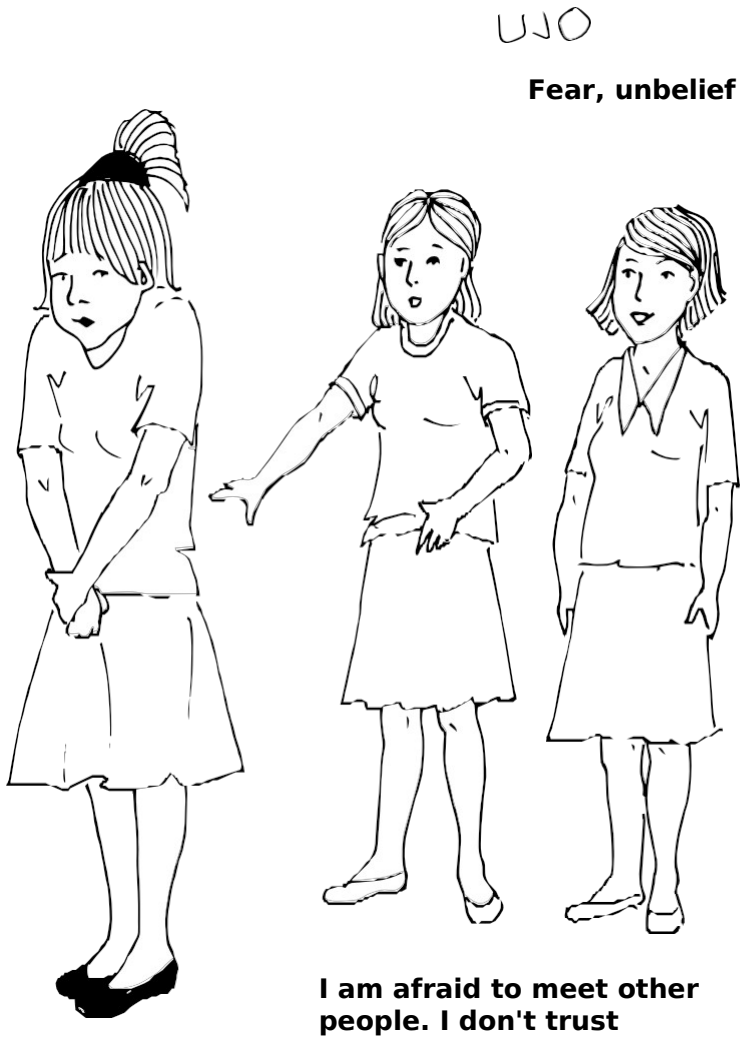
We must reject lies and accept the truth. “See, you desire truth in the innermost being; you teach me wisdom in the secret heart” (Ps. 51:8, NIV). “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Ps. 66:18).

Shy

A shy person reacts to others with fear. It is difficult for them to believe that they could be loved and appreciated for who they are. This fear may stem from conditional love experienced in childhood. Shy people fear criticism, failure, and rejection.

Fear weakens and makes a person self-centered. It clouds the mind, making it easy to focus on what one fears. Fear only controls us when we give it space in our minds.

God wants us to learn to direct our minds and our will. “Everything is permissible for me, but not everything is beneficial; everything is permissible for me, but I will not be dominated by anything” (1 Cor. 6:12, NIV). Jesus is the Lord of our lives. “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am” (John 13:13, ESV). The timid must acknowledge their fear in order to be free from it and follow God, believing in His word.



Sample prayer:

> *“Dear Father, I confess that I have listened to the lies of the devil and allowed fear to control my mind. Thank you for forgiving my unbelief. I renounce the spirit of fear and accept the truth in my life that you do not want me to be afraid, but give me strength, love, and a spirit of sound judgment. Dear Jesus, bring to my mind all the fears that have controlled me so that I may reject them and follow you in faith in your promises. I ask this in Jesus' name.*

After this, the shy person must confess and reject every fear that Jesus brings to mind. They must also learn to take risks, come out of their shell, and trust more in God, themselves, and other people.

Angry

> An angry person has been hurt. They feel that life has cheated them, and they constantly try to get even. Anger is their defense mechanism. An angry person feels an inner inadequacy and often also pain.

The lie that an angry person believes: *"I have the right to be angry. I will not forgive those who have hurt me because they do not deserve it. I do not trust anyone, and I do not love anyone."*

An angry person is stuck in anger and accusations, which they use to cover up their own pain and feelings of inadequacy. They must learn to deal with their anger constructively, to forgive others, themselves, and even God. Angry people must relearn how to love and trust God and other people.

The Pretender

The pretender has taken on so many roles that he doesn't even know who he really is. He always changes his behavior depending on how others treat him. It is likely that his ability to trust was broken in childhood.

The lie that the pretender believes: *"Please people, and they will love you."*

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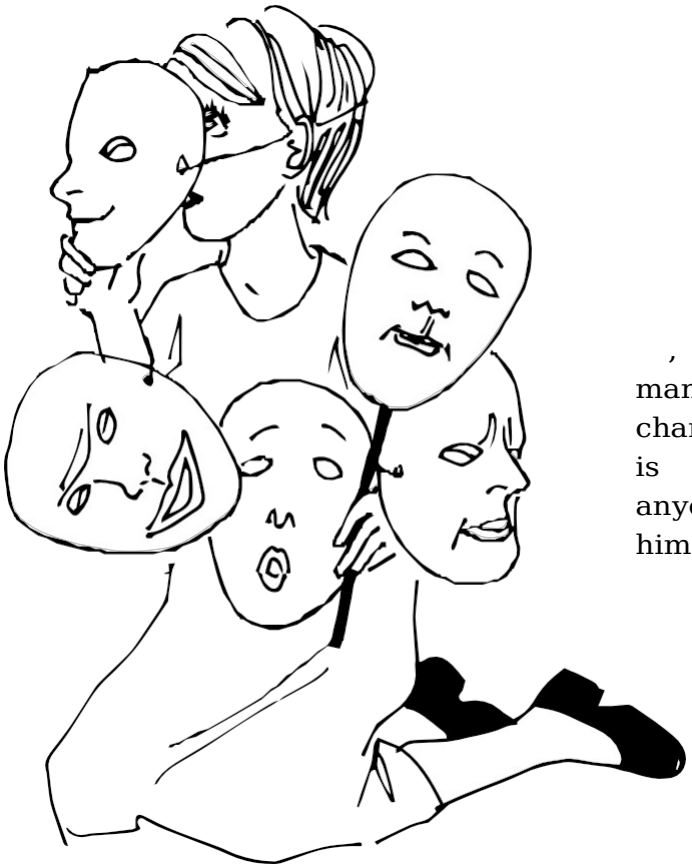
Inauthenticity



, the pretender, has many masks that he changes as needed. He is not honest with anyone, not even himself.

“Am I now trying to win the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10, NIV).

A pretender does not dare to face conflict. He cannot trust anyone, nor can he love or appreciate anyone, because deep down he knows he is pretending. He is dishonest with himself and others.

Self-righteous

> A self-righteous person has learned that if he is wrong, others will not accept and love him, but will consider him evil. In order to get his needs met, he tries by all means to be right. It is almost impossible for them to admit that they are wrong about anything, that they fail, or that they make mistakes. Admitting these things could mean losing all acceptance and love. That would be too painful.

The lie that the self-righteous person believes: *"If I am wrong, others will not accept or love me. I will then be a bad and failed person."*

A self-righteous person has a reasonable explanation for everything they do. When they make mistakes or are wrong, they should practice saying, "*I'm sorry*." By doing so, they will find that with an honest and humble attitude, they will receive more acceptance from others. The truth sets you free in this case as well. “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32, NIV). “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (1 Peter 5:6, NIV). “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:6–7, NKJV).

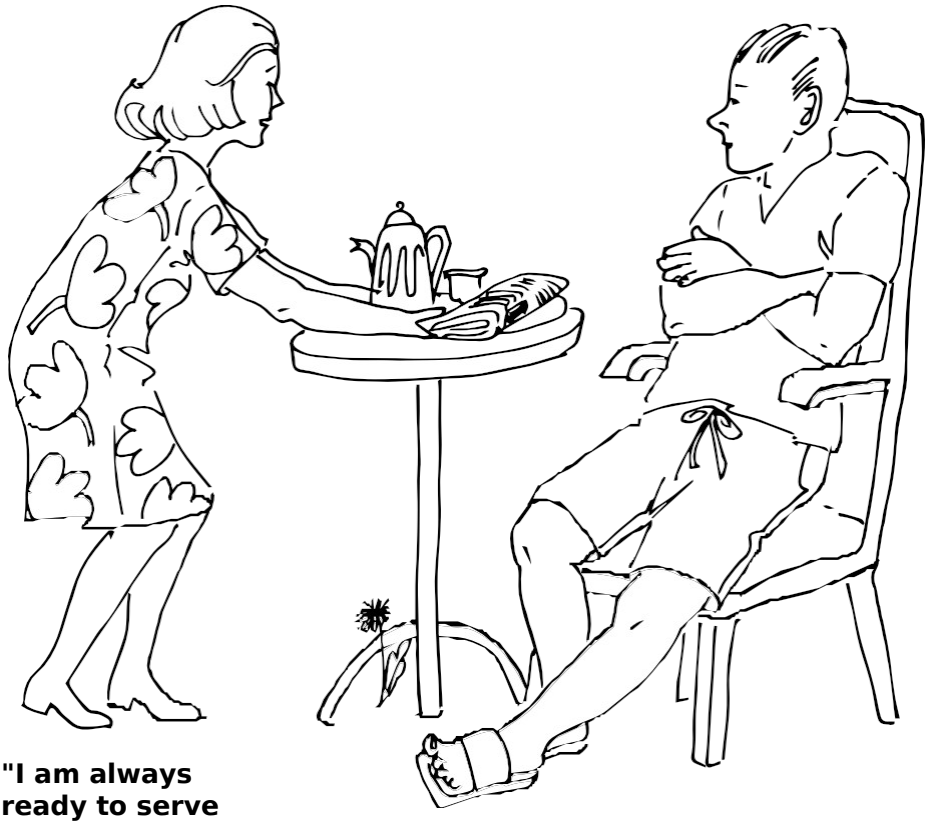
Kind

A kind person always does what they believe others expect of them. They strive to please others and always say “yes.” A kind person never gets angry, but learns to accept everything and adapt to the situations and people they encounter. They never “rock the boat.”

The lie that a kind person believes: *“Don’t show others who you really are. They may not like you and reject you.”*

KILTTI IHMINEN

Emptiness, loneliness, fearfulness



"I am always ready to serve others."

A kind person is afraid to be themselves. If they did what they wanted, they might lose the approval of others. A kind person may lose touch with what they really want and who they really are. They have done everything according to the rules and others' expectations, but deep down they feel trapped, betrayed, and bored. They are living someone else's life.

A kind person cannot open their heart because others would find out that they are not as nice as they have led others to believe. They must learn to say “no” and mean it. They must give their heart to God and believe what the Bible says about them. “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10, NIV).

(The above character traits are quoted from John Cray's book "What You Feel You Can Heel").

We are protected by God's armor. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And do this with all prayer and supplication, praying at all times in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:10–18, VK).

The power of the devil	**The power of God**
Lies	Truth
Distorted emotions	Genuine feelings
Selfishness	Holy Spirit

Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow character, reap destiny!

The thoughts in our minds are like plants growing in the ground. They grow if you leave them alone. If you repeat your negative thoughts aloud, they gain strength to grow. We can decide for ourselves what kind of thoughts we nurture in our minds. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8, NIV). “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV).

Every person has lies in their life that need to be confessed and forgiven by God. He forgives them on the basis of Christ’s atoning work and illuminates even the darkest corners of our minds with truth.

Be renewed in your mind – “Be renewed in your mind and spirit, and put on the new self, created in God’s image, to live a righteous and holy life” (Eph. 4:23–25). “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

“In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. This is the riches of God’s grace” (Eph. 1:7). Believe that God is your friend and helper. He wants to restore his moral image in man. When you come to him in repentance and confession of your sins, he will come to you with mercy and forgiveness.

God wants you to give Him your whole life. He wants you to live joyfully and happily in His presence. God wants to heal every area of our lives. We should not cling to any problem, big or small. “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).

“But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God, to all who believe in him. They were not born

of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12).

Liberation

The conditions for receiving God's grace are simple, fair, and reasonable:

— Those who confess their sins and forsake them will receive mercy. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Proverbs 28:13, NKJV). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NKJV).

— Confess your faults to one another. "Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16).

— Pray for one another so that you may be healed.

— Forgive everyone who has wronged you.

— Ask for forgiveness if you have wronged others. "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15, NIV).

— Bless those who have hurt you. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14).

"Sins, both public and secret, must be confessed wholeheartedly and voluntarily. The wrongdoer must not be pressured to confess. Confession of sin is not acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reform" (E. G. White: The Way to Christ, pp. 37–38).

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; take your evil deeds out of my sight; cease to do evil. Learn to do good; seek justice, correct the violent, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:16–17, VK). "See

See what great zeal this godly sorrow has produced in you, what defense, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! You have shown yourselves to be pure in every way in this matter" (2 Cor. 7:11, NIV).

> **"Those who have not humbled their souls before God by confessing their guilt have not yet fulfilled the first condition of being accepted.The only reason you have not been forgiven for your past sins is that you do not want to humble your heart and conform to the conditions of truth.When sin has dulled moral perception, the wrongdoer does not perceive the flaws in his character or realize the horror of his evil deeds. Unless he allows the power of the Holy Spirit to convict him, he remains partially blind to his sin. Their confessions are neither honest nor sincere. Every time they admit their guilt, they present circumstances as excuses for their reprehensible behavior" (E. G. White: The Way to Christ, pp. 35–37).**

You don't love me	**Accusations**
	I am angry! This is your fault.

This person does not take responsibility for his feelings and choices.

Unhealthy self-defense stems from the father of lies. "You are from Satan. He is your father, and you want to satisfy his desires. Satan has been a murderer from the beginning. He is far from the truth; it is foreign to him. When he lies, he is speaking his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

> **"True repentance leads you to bear your guilt yourself and confess it without deceit or pretense. You who confess your guilt will be justified, for Jesus appeals to his blood, which he shed for the repentant soul" (E. G. White: The Way to Christ, p. 37).**

David’s psalm:

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered! Blessed is the person to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit! When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave for my sin. Selah.

Therefore let all the godly pray to you while you may be found. Though floods of water rise up, they will not reach them. You are my refuge, you will protect me from trouble, you will surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."

Do not be like senseless horses or mules, which must be controlled with bit and bridle, or they will not come near you. The wicked have many troubles, but those who trust in the Lord are surrounded by mercy. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous ones, and sing for joy, all you upright in heart” (Ps. 32, VK).

5

Four meaningful steps in the life of

We can learn many things from the stages of the Israelites' journey through metaphors. We are all on a journey either from Egypt to the land of Canaan or from the land of Canaan to Egypt. Egypt represents "the world" (life without God).

Twelve men are sent to spy on the land of Canaan (Num. 13:1–5). Ten of the spies felt that conquering the land of Canaan was impossible: the people living there were powerful (Num. 13:28, 31–33). There were heavily fortified cities, and the inhabitants were like giants. They were afraid. They felt like grasshoppers. They feared for their lives in their new homeland. Even today, many people see only the difficulties ahead of them: overwhelming temptations, various "strongholds" in their hearts, and the "giants" in their own lives, such as anger, fear, bitterness, insecurity, low self-esteem, family curses and burdens, alcohol, violence, suicide, illness, etc. We fear the above because their power is greater than our own. We feel helpless to resist the temptations and difficulties of life.

Only two spies, Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:6–10), brought back an encouraging message. They knew God and had experienced His power. “Do not rebel against the Lord, and do not be afraid of the people of that land, for they are no match for us. Their protection has been removed from them, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them” (Numbers 14:9, NIV).

We too have received a message of hope: Jesus died on the cross. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” He promised to be with us every day until the end of the world (Matthew 28:18, 20, NIV). We too can be victorious, and because God is with us, we need not fear.

1. The people preferred to believe the bad news and began to rebel against the Lord, promising to return to Egypt (Numbers 14:3–4).

> *Taisto came to me for treatment because he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He was an atheist. I promised to talk with him if he agreed to pray together. He agreed. We explored the roots of Taisto's current difficulties, which stretched far back into his childhood. He had experienced deep rejection and had begun to believe early on that he was not good enough for others. However, during our discussions, he chose to forgive his parents and many others who had hurt him. He humbled himself, repented of his sins, gave his life to Jesus, and began attending church. Taisto's health improved, and he felt happy. About a year after these*

events, his common-law wife left him because she did not accept Taisto's change.

He took another man who was willing to party and have fun the way she wanted. Taisto was devastated and began to drink heavily.

These adversities stirred up rebellion against God in Taisto's heart. The pain felt too great, and he sought comfort in another woman who came into his life. Little by little, he returned to his worldly lifestyle (Matt. 13:5–6). The good seed fell on rocky ground where there was not enough soil for the grain to take root.

2. The Israelites wanted to conquer the land of Canaan with their own hands (Deut. 1:41–45). They went into battle lightly, contrary to God's will.

   How do we react today? In my work, I often meet people who believe that they can overcome their addictions, pleasures, greed, gambling, ambition, etc. on their own. They may also believe that they can overcome their anger, bitterness, jealousy, unforgiveness, and many other difficulties on their own. Self-control may work for a few weeks. But it is often followed by a return to the same patterns of thinking and behavior as before. Only love for God, asking for His help, and walking with Him can bring lasting victory over the difficulties in our lives.

3. We cling to our own small sins (Joshua 7:1).

   Achan stole for himself the spoils that had been declared as an offering to the Lord. Then the Lord became angry. This manifested itself in a great defeat in the next battle (Joshua 7:10–12). All of Israel suffered because of the sin of one man. Conscious sin is destructive to the whole community. It had to be confessed and dealt with (Joshua 6:19). All the gold and silver was to be consecrated to the Lord, but Achan stole from the Lord. It is a serious matter to steal from people, but it is much more serious to steal from God. You may ask, where do we steal from God today? We are exhorted to bring our full tithes into the storehouse so that there will be food in the temple (Malachi 3:9–10). When we do this, we are promised abundant blessings. However, if we hold on to our sins, what can be the result?

Armas came to me. He was a devout man and wanted to get closer to God. He did not understand why he could not hear God's voice, even though he wanted to. John 10:4 says, "For they know his voice." Armas was a wealthy businessman and was devastated when his wife took their two children and left him. In his own opinion, he was a good and caring husband. I prayed with him that God would show him what was standing between him and God. After the prayer, I waited for a moment and saw that big tears were flowing from his eyes. I asked him what God had shown him. Armas said that God did not approve of his occasional visits to prostitutes. He admitted his sins, repented deeply, and asked God for forgiveness. He understood that he had offended both God and his wife. His husband had acted in complete secrecy, yet his behavior had damaged his family relationships and his relationship with God. His hidden sin had blinded him (2 Cor. 4:4). Armas gave his life back to God. I asked him to call me every week and tell me if he had stuck to his decision. God's love won his heart and gave him the strength to overcome his desires. After this experience, Armas began to hear God's voice.

If sin is in your heart, "you cannot stand before your enemies" (Joshua 7:13, NKJV).

- Confess your sin and repent with all your heart. By doing so, you will be freed from its power (1 John 1:9, 7).
- Even if you hide your sins from people, God knows everything. In the end, sin will destroy you. This is what happened to Achan (Joshua 7:25; 1 John 1:6).

Achan admitted his sin (Joshua 7:20–21). Admitting is quite different from confessing sin, repenting, and doing penance (2 Corinthians 7:10; Acts 3:19).

The four steps of Achan's sin (Joshua 7:21):

1. **“I saw...”** (temptation is not yet sin).

2. **“I coveted...”** (the will agrees with the desire, sin is conceived in the mind).

3. **"I took..."** (the conceived sin leads to wrong behavior, action).

4. **"I hid...**" "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Proverbs 28:13, NKJV).

Akan knew exactly what the Lord wanted, and God gave him time to repent and make amends. But sin blinded his eyes, and he did not see the seriousness of the situation.

Has sin blinded your eyes so that you do not realize where you

are really headed? The same four steps can be found in Eve's sin

in paradise (Genesis 3:6–8):

1. Eve saw that the fruit of the tree was good to eat.
2. They were desirable because they gave understanding.
3. She took the fruit, ate it, and gave some to her husband.
4. They hid from God.

The same thing happened to David (2 Sam. 11):

1. He saw Bathsheba bathing.
2. He lusted after the beautiful woman.
3. He slept with her.
4. David concealed his actions (2 Sam. 11:15) and had his trusted warrior killed.

When temptation beckons, how should it be dealt with in the right way?

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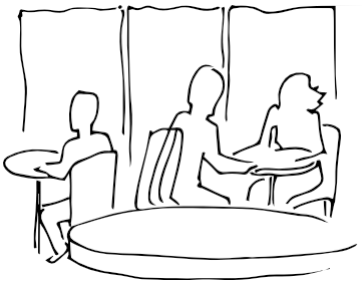

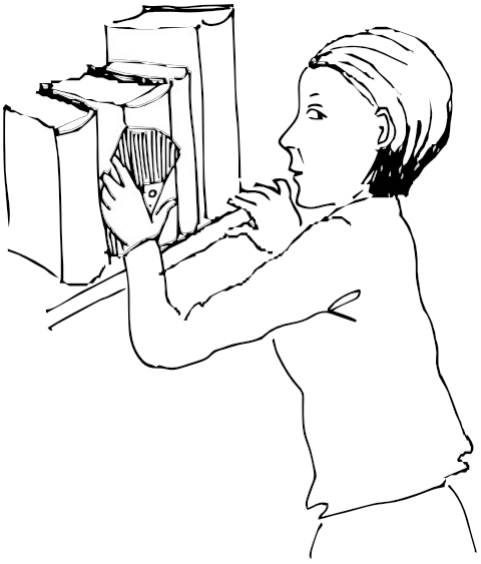

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When I see a tempting situation:

1. **I turn my gaze away from it** and look to Jesus. I do not give in to temptation.

2. **I pray to God for help**.

3. **I resist temptation with God's word.** The next time temptation tempts me, I will face it with determination and resist it. The power of temptation diminishes when it is resisted with God's help. Resisting temptation also strengthens my faith.

> **“No one, when tempted, should say, ‘God is tempting me,’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when they are drawn away and enticed by their own desire. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death" (James 1:13-15, NIV).**

What can we learn from Akan's mistake? Many of us hear God's call to follow Him toward eternal life. We may accept the call with joy. When difficulties arise, we begin to rebel against God. Instead of humility, obedience, and trust, we gradually begin to return to the world we left behind. Rebellion against God is compared to witchcraft in the Bible. “Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft” (1 Sam. 15:23).

Many people go out to fight their own giants, sins, weaknesses, and difficulties lightly, relying on their own strength. If we hold on to our little sins, we may cause suffering to both our family and the whole church. Instead, we should humble ourselves before the Lord and reexamine our relationship with God. Peter urges us to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Our part is to seek God's will in different situations and to accept His guidance, no matter how it feels.

An example of this is the conquest of Jericho in Joshua chapter 6. God promised to give Jericho to the Israelites if they followed His instructions. The people marched around Jericho once a day for six days. On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times, and the priests blew their trumpets. The long ram's horn

After the battle, the people raised a war cry and the city walls collapsed. God could have taken care of the matter without people, but the Israelites needed the experience of God's help. God wants to connect with us in order to work with us.

Jehoshaphat defeats his enemies! (2 Chronicles 20:15–16, 20–24)

- The battle is God's.
- Trust in the Lord God, and no one will defeat you.
- Give thanks to the Lord and praise him.

We should thank God that he rules over everything. When we give our difficulties and pains to him, the Lord can, in some hidden way, turn them into blessings for us in his own time and way.

We will reach heaven by clinging in faith to Christ's work of atonement on our behalf. Out of love for him, we want to seek his will. In this way, we can grow closer to Christ. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not only as in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:12–13, NIV). “Do not be afraid of them, for the Lord your God himself will fight for you” (Deut. 3:22). “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13, NKJV). “I can endure all things through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13).

The temptations of our fleshly nature are never stronger than God's power. Sinful people receive life when they unite themselves with Christ (Rom. 8:6). This happens when we believe in him as our personal savior. Sinners can unite their weakness with Christ's strength, their emptiness with Christ's fullness, their fragility with Christ's enduring power, and their brokenness with Christ's wholeness. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

When a person's will aligns with God's will, no task He gives them is impossible to accomplish, for He gives them the wisdom and strength to carry it out. Cooperation with God brings the greatest satisfaction to life and prepares us for eternal life.

Questions:

— Have your eyes led you into sin?

— Have you ever rebelled against God's guidance?

— Have you tried to overcome yourself and the temptations of the world by your own strength?

— Do you indulge in some sin, believing that God will "turn a

blind eye" to it? Do you believe:

Good news:

- **Faith**
- **Trust**
- **Hope**
- I believe that Jesus died for me.
- I will overcome the difficulties in my life with God's help.
- I confess my sins and repent deeply.
- Eternal life.

Bad news:

- **Unbelief**
- **Distrust**
- **Hopelessness**
- I see only insurmountable difficulties and rebel against them and against God.
- I fight with my own strength, without Juma-laa.
- I hold on to my little sins.
- Death.

Four steps to sin (Joshua 7:21)

1. I saw, I heard, I felt.
2. I coveted; When desire and covetousness come together, sin is conceived. It waits to be realized.
3. I took, I fell...
4. I hid, concealed, covered up...

Four steps to overcoming sin

1. I see, hear, feel the temptation, the situation...
2. I turn my eyes, my ears, my senses away from it and look to Jesus. I will not give in to temptation!
3. I pray to God for help: "Dear God, in the name and blood of Jesus, give me the strength to resist this temptation!"
4. I resist temptation with God's word and promises.

**"The Lord is my helper"
(Hebrews 13:6).**

KÄÄNNÄ
KATSEESTÄ
POIS
RUKOILE
APUA
TAIVAASTA
VASTUSTA
KIUSAUSTA

6

's problem with suffering

“The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).

There are three kinds of suffering:

1. **“The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one”** (1 John 5:19).

2. **We are subject to the law of cause and effect.** “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

3. **We suffer for righteousness and justice.** “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). “It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1:29).

The whole world is under the power of evil—as a result, bad and unpleasant things happen to people:

— Illnesses and accidents cut life short too soon.

— Hunger and poverty are on the rise.

— Quarrels and many difficulties break up families.

— Addictions destroy people.

— There are many forms of exploitation, slavery, violence, and other crimes.

This is a brief list of the evil that surrounds us. Suffering is tragic and sad. It is the result of Adam's fall into sin. He surrendered his dominion to the devil, who "comes only to steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10).

Cause and effect

> **“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (Galatians 6:7).**

Good sowing brings a good harvest, bad sowing brings a bad harvest. We get to choose how we live. The harvest will be reaped later!

Marja, a middle-aged woman, came to me. She was in trouble. Marja was married to a domineering and bitter man. They did not get along. They had constant power struggles and arguments. Marja said that she had previously been married to a wonderful, loving, understanding man who traveled for work. While her husband was away, Marja had lovers, was immature, and was often mean to her good husband. Marja said she couldn't understand the reason for her own cruelty. After some time, the man divorced her. This hurt Marja for years to come. She longed to be with her husband again, but he had remarried.

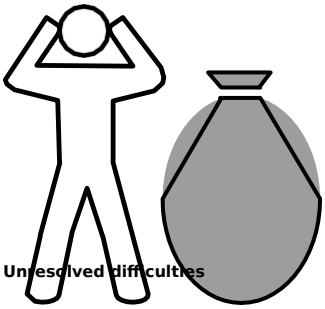
Marja talked about her childhood home. Marja's father was abusive towards Marja's mother and set a distorted example of marriage for his children. Marja felt sorry for her mother, who divorced her father later in life. Marja had not forgiven her father and was angry with him. Her father had died long ago. She subconsciously took out her anger on her husband, who was confused by his wife's cruelty. The truth of the Bible came true in Marja (Romans 2:1). Marja condemned her father and was angry with him. This bound Marja to do the same things her father had done. The seeds of hatred she had sown produced bad fruit for her. Marja's pain was so great that it broke her pride, and she began to seek help from God. Now she was ready to forgive her father, her husband, and herself. Marja chose to give her life to Jesus. She was willing to leave all her burdens and worries to God. Little by little, her relationship with her husband began to improve. God blessed their marriage and Marja's inner healing in a miraculous way. Marja gave up all her masks and strove for openness and authenticity. Now Marja's heart is whole and her pain is gone. She lives a happy life, surrendering her affairs to Jesus. She prays a lot and reads the Bible every day.

Many times, suffering is caused by wrong choices. Pain is a good teacher. If we don't learn any other way, pain makes us better or stronger people. The choice is ours, and every choice has its consequences. When we regret our wrong choices and ask God for forgiveness, God forgives us. The consequences do not always disappear.

> *I met Siiri, who was confined to a wheelchair. I talked to her and asked her what had happened to her. She told me her sad story. When she was young, Siiri had fallen in love with a man whom her parents did not approve of. They were so in love that they couldn't imagine living without each other. Due to their parents' strict attitude, they decided to end their lives together. They got a gun and went into the woods with the intention of committing suicide. They decided that the man would shoot Siiri first and then himself. The man did not understand where to shoot and hit Siiri in the middle of her stomach. The bullet did not kill her, but paralyzed her beloved. Because Siiri did not die, the man panicked and was unable to shoot himself, but instead went to seek help for the suffering Siiri. After this, they separated, and Siiri never remarried. Later, Siiri found faith. She repented of her sins and forgave the man, but the damage had already been done, and Siiri was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life.*

How often do we have to bear the consequences of our sins! That is why we should think twice about our words, behavior, actions, and choices. What are the consequences of our behavior patterns? Are they constructive or destructive to ourselves and others? What are the likely consequences? How often do I have to talk to people who are suffering from the consequences of their behavior or actions! These include broken relationships, divorces, hurt children who do not keep in touch with their parents, or children who live recklessly and with whom their parents no longer have contact.

Everyone faces challenges in their daily lives. We can choose both our attitude and our reaction to them.



Unresolved difficulties discourage us and take away our freedom!

There are two types of difficulties:

Difficulties that we must cope with (we cannot do anything about them ourselves)

- death or illness of a loved one
- loss of a job
- separation or divorce
- accidents, etc.

We need

- endurance
- the support and help of others
- prayers

"Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (Eph. 6:10).

Difficulties that can be overcome

- coping can be a tough battle
- takes time
- requires resources.

We need

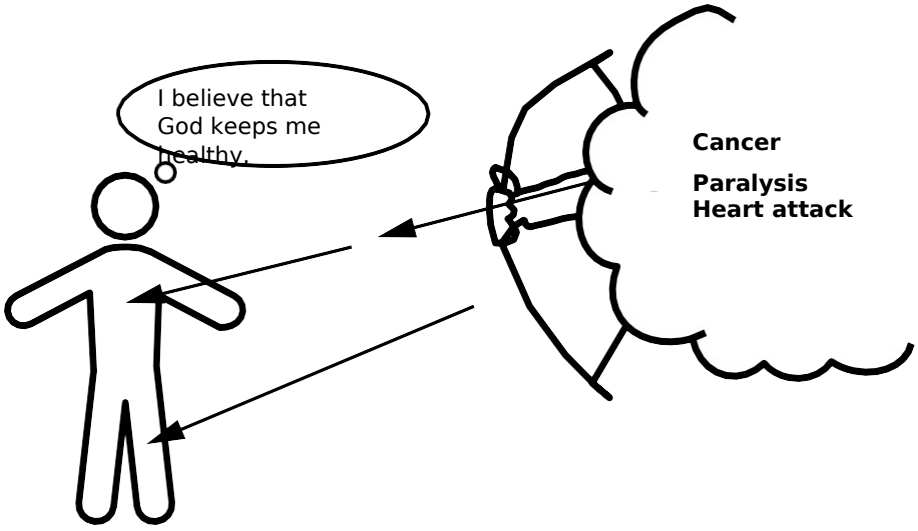
- a lot of energy
- the right steps
- knowledge of what to do when faced with difficulties
- people who have enough knowledge and experience to help.

"Get wisdom, for it is more precious than rubies; get understanding, and apply your heart to it" (Prov. 4:7).

We suffer for righteousness and justice

> **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).**
>
> **“Although he was a son, he had to learn obedience through suffering” (Hebrews 5:8).**

Suffering forces us to take off our masks and veils. It reveals our true faith. Difficulties expose the weaknesses in our relationship with God that we would not otherwise have learned to recognize. Difficulties are a challenge for us. We say we love and believe in God as a loving Father, but is that true for us? How quickly do we turn to Him for help when we are in trouble? How quickly do we throw our faith overboard when our lives and our beliefs collide?



When life and beliefs collide, what happens to faith?

How often do we angrily blame God when we encounter pain, sorrow, disappointment, a spouse's infidelity, or some other loss? Can our faith withstand trials?

Difficulties and trials reveal our faith and our true colors. What we say we believe is not very important. Those around us evaluate our faith based on how we respond to suffering. “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11).

Burning heat and strong winds come to everyone during their lifetime. Sometimes we see them coming—we hear the siren and are on our guard. Other times, unexpectedly, the ground is pulled out from under our feet and we fall to the ground. At such times, our faith is tested, and we should ask ourselves, *“What can I hold on to now?”* or *“Where is my refuge?”*

If the truth has convinced us, we flee to God when we are in trouble. We do not turn our backs on him. I am certain that God uses suffering to test and purify us. The purpose of suffering is to make us stronger people. When we realize and understand this, we are ready to follow Him regardless of the circumstances. I hope that our reaction to suffering reveals to us the quality of our trust in God and His goodness.

The story of Job in the Bible has brought great comfort to many. We can find peace when we realize that we cannot determine the length of our lives on earth. However, we can choose how we live. My motto is: *"Control what you can control and leave to God what you cannot control."*

I hope that suffering helps us develop a compassionate nature. Our environment needs people who understand others who are suffering. In times of crisis, we all have the opportunity to either run to God with our suffering, or we can become angry with God and abandon Him in disappointment.

When we bring our pain before God, we experience inner comfort. God does not always take it away or change the situation, but gives meaning to the suffering and strength to endure it. “Whoever walks in deep darkness without light should trust in the name of the Lord and rely on God” (Isaiah 50:10). The purpose of suffering may not be immediately clear to us. It may take months, years, even decades before we understand how God used our suffering to fulfill His plans for us. Only God can turn everything, even the worst things, to serve His good purposes. I have seen this in the lives of many people.

During suffering, I can choose:

I can run away from God

- fear
- anxiety
- confusion
- loneliness
- panic
- anger
- disappointment
- hardness, coldness, and judgmental attitude toward others who are suffering
- unwillingness to listen to other people's problems withdrawal.

I flee into God's embrace

- He comforts, forgives, guides, and loves
- give us the strength to continue
- we learn to better understand those who suffer with the love we have received from God
- we learn to comfort others (we are given the key to how to make the invisible God visible so that we understand how to meet those who suffer)
- we are present when others need help
- our ability to comfort and encourage grows
- we learn to love and serve as Jesus did.

Through our own difficulties, we learn to better understand God's goodness and reliability. This helps us to face the pain and suffering in other people's lives. We learn how to comfort, encourage, love, and strengthen those in need.

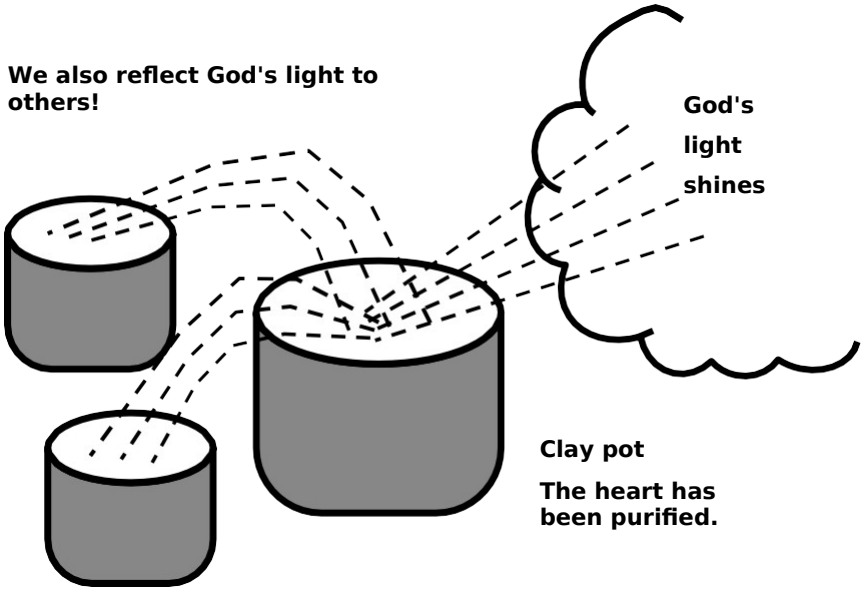
How do we approach someone who is suffering?

It is not always easy to know how to approach someone who is suffering. The Bible provides answers to this question.

Throughout the Old Testament, God reminded His children of His presence. “The pillar of cloud was always in front of the people during the day and the pillar of fire at night” (Exodus 13:22). They did not need to fear anything because God was with them, guiding, protecting, and lighting their way. But the people did not want to understand this.

How do you relate to a God you cannot see or touch? God sent Jesus into the world to show what God is like and who He is. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15). “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3).

God gave himself to us in Jesus. He is our greatest gift. Jesus expects us to follow his example and give ourselves to him. “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them” (John 17:18).



As followers of Jesus, you and I are Jesus' vessels.

We keep him in a fragile clay vessel, our hearts. The apostle Paul describes God's light in us as follows:

> **“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in clay vessels,**

so that it may be seen that this tremendous power comes from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:6-7).

When we accept Jesus as our Savior and King, He comes to live in our hearts. “For behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21, NKJV). The gospel does not offer us a “new self,” but Jesus Christ, who wants to dwell in each of us through the Holy Spirit. When we encounter people who are sick, in pain, suffering, grieving, lonely, etc., the Holy Spirit offers his help.

People have different needs:

— to hear the message of salvation

— to be reconciled with God

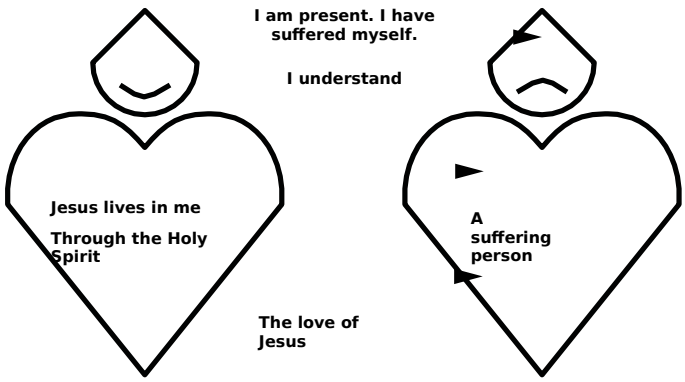
— to receive assurance of God's love

— to be encouraged

— to experience comfort and love, etc.

Prayer and the presence of the Holy Spirit are essential.

How does God's presence manifest itself in us?

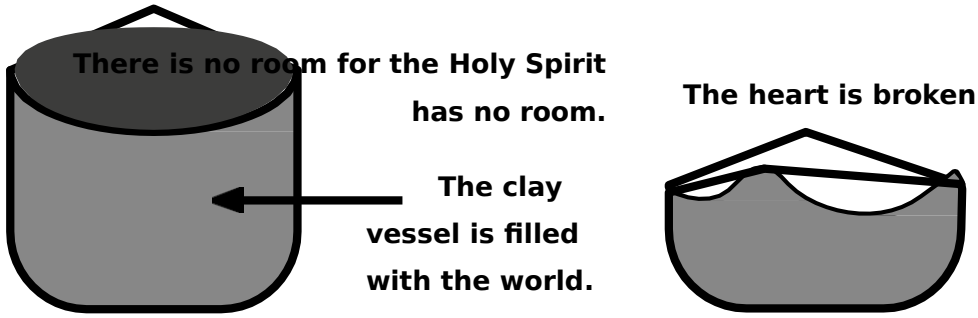

I am present. I have suffered myself.
I understand
Jesus lives in me
Through the Holy Spirit
A suffering person
The love of Jesus

Presence means devoting oneself wholeheartedly to another person. We strive to establish an emotional connection with those in need of help.

The suffering person is told of Jesus' genuine love for them. Jesus becomes real when we follow his example by sharing love, mercy, and compassion. When we do our best, Jesus blesses our work. Jesus' life was a living testimony of God. As his followers, this is also our task: to make the invisible God visible to the world and lead people to him. The Holy Spirit is willing to guide our daily lives. Following Jesus' example is the best testimony to the world. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. For it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Rom. 1:17).

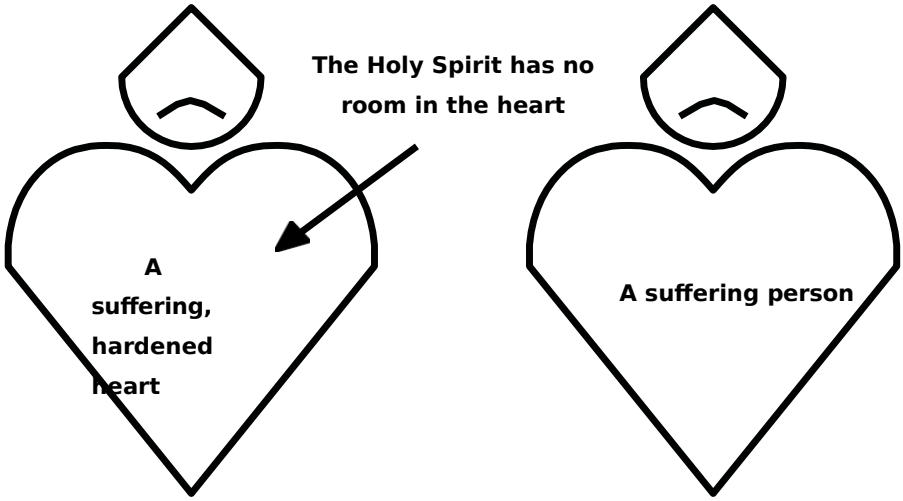
When we understand Jesus' presence (Matthew 28:20), we begin to value our encounters with people. The Holy Spirit helps us to love and serve others with sacrificial love and joy that springs from grace.

Cognitive knowledge of God is not enough. Without a personal experience of God, the heart of a helper can become hardened by disappointments and difficulties, "because my word has no place in you" (John 8:37, VK).



A dangerous helper.

According to the Bible, not everyone opens their heart to God's work. There can be many obstacles at the doorways of people's hearts. It is difficult for them to open their hearts, which are filled with things that are important to them. They are not aware of the true state of their hearts, but the Holy Spirit is ready to enlighten them when asked.



Spiritual or emotional connection with others is blocked.

Pity, compassion, and other positive feelings are shut out of the heart. What remains is coldness, hardness, and a desire to judge. If we are not aware of our own situation, we may add to the burdens of those who suffer.

There was a fanatical man in the congregation. He was a farmer in good health. He found it difficult to understand sick and suffering people. The man was self-confident and knew his Bible well. But its words did not touch his heart. He demanded too much from his children. When the children grew up, they turned their backs on their father and also on God. I talked with his children. They said, "If God is as controlling, harsh, and demanding as our father, we don't want anything to do with him." With his harshness and lack of understanding, he hurt many people. At over 80 years of age, this man fell ill with a serious form of cancer. Before his death, he hoped to see his children, whom he had not seen for over twenty years. The children reluctantly accepted his invitation. In his suffering, the father began to

understand others. He apologized to his children, and they reconciled before his death.

What is the state of your heart? Are there still hard areas where you may unknowingly hurt other people?

Job's friends

> **“Job had three friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. When they heard about the disaster that had befallen Job, they went to see each other and decided to go to him to show him sympathy and comfort him. From a distance they saw him, but they did not recognize him. When they came closer, they began to weep aloud, tore their cloaks, and threw sand into the air so that it fell on their heads. They sat down beside him on the ground and remained there for seven days and seven nights. None of them said anything to Job, for they saw how terrible his pain was” (Job 2:11–13).**

From Job's friends, we can learn how to behave toward a person who is suffering. A person who is suffering needs:

— Empathy: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).

— Presence, even without words, if necessary.

— Comfort, encouragement, prayer.

Many times I have encountered people who have been hurt by inappropriate words. “The Lord saves us from the power of evil words” (Ps. 91:3). We must be careful in our speech when we encounter those who are suffering or grieving.

When our firstborn died, I couldn't comprehend the thoughtlessness and cruelty with which we, young parents who had lost a child, were treated. Now I understand that they did not know what they were doing. Their hearts were hard. Realizing this made it easier to forgive. I decided that I did not want to add to the pain of those who were grieving with my own lack of understanding.

I hope that your own suffering has helped you to understand and support others who are suffering.

7

The Covenant with God

– The covenant between David and Jonathan

“So Jonathan made a covenant with David’s family and said, ‘May the Lord take vengeance on David’s enemies!’ And Jonathan asked David to swear by their mutual love, for he loved David as much as his own life” (1 Sam. 20:16–17).

After King Saul and Jonathan died in battle, David became king of Israel and Judah. Then David remembered his covenant with Jonathan and sought out Jonathan’s descendants. David found Jonathan’s son.

> **“Saul’s son Jonathan had a crippled son. He was five years old when the news came from Jezreel about the fate of Saul and Jonathan. His nurse had taken him with her when she fled, but in her haste she dropped him, and he was crippled. His name was Mephibosheth" (2 Sam. 4:4).**

This is the story of Jonathan's young son. The nurse feared David's revenge after Saul's death and fled the palace with the king's grandson. On the way, the boy hurt his foot and was crippled. The boy had no part in what had happened.

Many of us have wounds in our hearts that are not our own fault or the result of our own choices. Our self-esteem may have been damaged when we were children, resulting in low self-esteem. These can be obstacles to God's blessings. If you have a negative image of yourself, read the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel chapter 9. This story will open your eyes to see why you have not received the blessings God has for you.

Mephibosheth had lived for years in a small town called Lo-Dabar (2 Sam. 9:4). The name means “a little cultivated land.” In the culture of that time, farmland was a prerequisite for life, and this place was probably a poor one. A wounded sense of self- worth in childhood is reflected in the whole family's attitude to life. We choose our environment based on our inner feelings. People with a negative attitude toward life do not care enough about themselves. How they feel is reflected in their behavior. Some, on the other hand, may go to the other extreme. It is easy to hide feelings of inferiority behind a mask of perfection. They strive for perfection in their home environment. The pursuit of perfection puts pressure on the whole family. Mutual love does not grow under pressure, but withers away.

God wants to bless us, even though we are weak and imperfect.
value is measured by the cross, and external things are of little importance. Only the awareness of our identity in Christ matters. We are God's children, and we all have the same Father (Hebrews 2:11).

So you can relax and accept help from our Father God. God wants us to have peace in our hearts. “That you may have peace in me” (John 16:33). Your shortcomings do not prevent God from working in your life. God does not want you to live like Mephibosheth in the dry wilderness, but wants you to experience the abundance of His love and goodness. God rejoices that He can be merciful to us (2 Cor. 6:1).

“Your goodness and love surround me all the days of my life” (Ps. 23:6).

"Lord, your mercy is as vast as the heavens, your truth reaches to the clouds. Your righteousness is higher than the mountains, your justice deeper than the depths. You help both man and beast, Lord. How wonderful is your mercy, God! The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings” (Ps. 36:6–8).

David found Mephibosheth. “Mephibosheth bowed down and said, ‘Who am I, your servant, that you should show such kindness to a dead dog like me?’” (2 Sam. 9:8). Mephibosheth had a poor image of himself, that of a dead dog. He could have seen himself as the rightful heir of Saul and Jonathan, but he saw himself as rejected by everyone. If he hadn't had this attitude, he would have gone to David long ago to claim his inheritance.

Poor self-esteem drives us to act out of fear rather than faith (2 Tim. 1:7; 2 Cor. 5:7). We often look for faults in ourselves instead of looking to God and what He is willing to do for us. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). We need to live in reality and truth.

Mephibosheth thought he was a “dead dog.” This kind of thinking prevents us from being who we could be and getting everything we could get out of life. Changing attitudes and thoughts takes time. It requires the help of the Holy Spirit. If we are firm in our decision, we do not need to remain outside of God’s blessings. Gradually, we can succeed in changing our negative thoughts and attitudes. Paul urges us: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). We can choose our own attitude, whether positive or negative.

David wanted to bless Saul's family member Jonathan because of the friendship covenant he had made with him (1 Sam. 18:3; 2 Sam. 20:14–16). Just as David sought someone to whom he could show friendship for Jonathan's sake, God seeks people to whom He can show friendship for Jesus' sake. God shows compassion and friendship toward us, but we must have room and a desire to receive Him. David's covenant with Jonathan's family applied to all of Jonathan's descendants. Mephibosheth did not take advantage of the rights of this covenant because he had a negative image of himself. Many of God's children behave in exactly the same way. They withdraw from God's presence out of fear instead of boldly approaching him. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). When we feel bad about ourselves, we have a distorted view of who we are. We believe the devil's lies and look for reasons within ourselves. But the truth sets us free. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).
But now a new one has come to replace it!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

David blessed Mephibosheth. He gave him back everything that belonged to Saul and his family (2 Sam. 9:9). David also gave him servants and took care of all his needs. The story ends with Mephibosheth living in Jerusalem and eating at the king's table despite his disability.

We can learn from Mephibosheth that God's goodness, mercy, and desire to help us are not based on our sinlessness, but on our covenant with His Son Jesus. When we are in Christ, we are part of this covenant (2 Cor. 5:17). A blood covenant was and still is one of the most binding agreements between two parties. In this covenant, we offer God what we have, and He gives us what He has. He takes away all our sins, lies, weaknesses, and failures and gives us his righteousness and strength. He takes away our poverty and gives us his riches. He takes away our diseases and illnesses and gives us his healing power and health. He takes away our past failures and gives us hope for a better future. In ourselves, we are nothing. Our own righteousness is like filthy rags (Zech. 3:4; Isa. 61:10). When we choose to give our lives to Jesus and believe in him (Gal. 3:26), we become children of God. In Jesus there is a future, because we are in union with the almighty God. What a wonderful truth this is!

We don't need to ask God to be good to us. He is good, and he seeks people whom he can bless for Jesus' sake. Make a decision today to enter into a covenant with God. Then you will receive what you have not earned through your work: God's free grace for all.

“But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name” (John 1:12).

“The angel said to his servants, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ Then the angel said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will clothe you with festive garments’” (Zechariah 3:4).

“I will rejoice in the Lord, I will exult in my God! He clothes me with garments of salvation and wraps me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland or as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

8

Building friendships

How to approach the people you love? Friendships build our lives. The greatest joy in our existence is to love and be loved. Friendships add value to life!

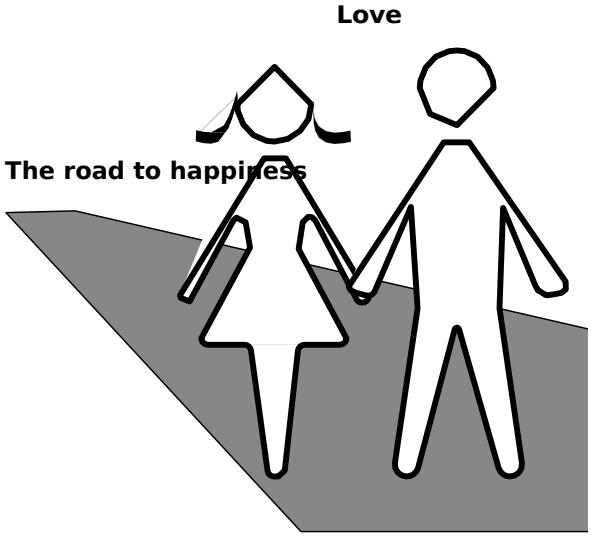
Have you ever wondered how some people manage to attract the admiration and affection of their friends? Even if they are not particularly good-looking, they attract the opposite sex like a magnet. Such people do not need to be rich, wise, or well-educated. Something about their personality makes others respect and admire them.

I have talked to many people and learned something about their secrets. Women often have more friends than men because they are, on average, more open than men. Even if you are introverted or shy, you can learn to build close relationships. Building relationships can be compared to learning to drive a car or play an instrument.

You don't need to learn how to express anger, but we all have to learn how to show love.

Mutual love is the path to happiness and friendship. God gave us material goods for our use and people around us whose presence we can enjoy. After the Fall, material things became more important than people. The purpose of sin is to prevent and disrupt the fulfillment of God's plans.

It is typical for loving people to have time to build relationships. They give quality time to their family and friends. Not all lonely people know how to or want to create lasting relationships. Emotional bonds do not strengthen on their own.



Love is like a plant that must be nurtured, otherwise it will wither. Friendships also wither if they are not cared for.

- Love must be learned
- Love requires quality time
- love must be nurtured
- Love is ready to listen
- Love strives to understand
- Love requires work
- Love is a choice
- Love serves
- Love is giving.

Everyone should have at least one reliable friend whom we can contact when needed. In difficult situations, it helps just to have someone who is willing to listen and try to understand. Sharing things with a true friend strengthens and increases our vitality. In friendships, quality replaces quantity. Some people believe that love is like a ripe apple that falls into their lap. Few good things in life come easily to us. We often have to work hard for them. Love is at its best when it is given, not received. God loved the world so much that he gave his son (John 3:16).

Be open and honest

People who build deep and lasting relationships have openness and honesty in common. This skill does not depend on personality, talent, or appearance. The unifying character trait for them is openness and honesty.

Human personality is built with a tendency to express oneself. When this natural trait is blocked for some reason and we close our hearts to others, problems begin to arise in our emotional life. Honesty and authenticity promote health. They strengthen friendships.

Masks we hide behind

We build protective barriers around ourselves for various reasons. We may hide feelings of inadequacy behind strength and determination, and low self-esteem behind coldness. Some people believe that they are more popular when they are distant and unapproachable. Distance does not lead to close friendships. Fear of rejection is a more serious reason for hiding behind masks. Openness always involves the risk of

vulnerability.

People become more interesting when they drop their masks. If we are willing to show others our scars, they will be willing to show us theirs.

I met a person whose emotional life was severely locked up. He didn't want to tell me anything about himself. Instead, I opened my heart to him. My story encouraged him to open up. I didn't have to ask him anything.

The pastoral care with him lasted a few months. The person chose a new direction for his life and his attitude began to change. Openness had a positive effect on his health as he opened his heart to God. God gave peace to his heart and healed his wounds.

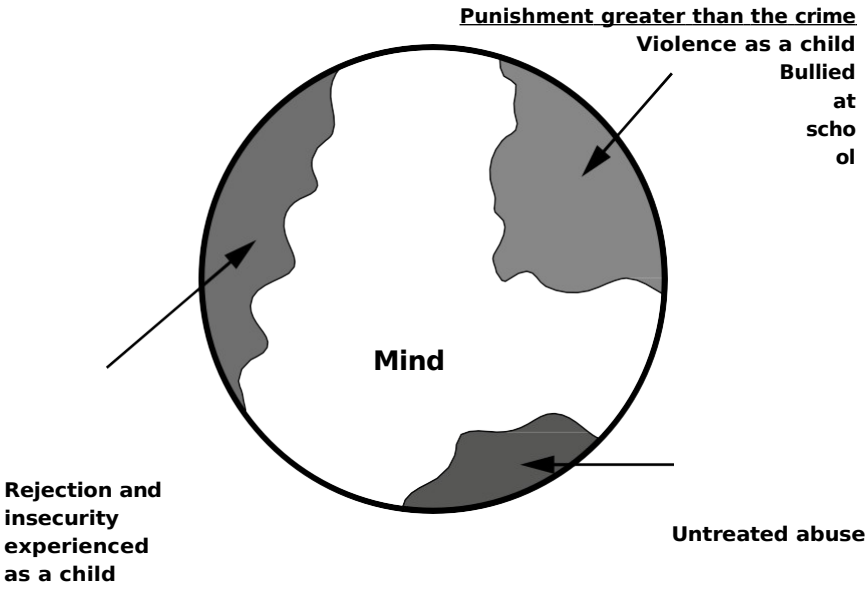
“A person who isolates themselves only looks at themselves—a quarrel is ready if you advise them” (Proverbs 18:1).

If we are prepared to build bigger windows and lower walls around us, we will have more friends and life will be brighter.

If you want friends, build windows, not walls!

Learn to recognize your own weaknesses

We all have character flaws and memories from the past that are difficult to face. The selfish, natural human being in us may rear its head. We have ready defenses and excuses for negative behavior.



Shadows of the mind

Hidden parts of the mind.

It is difficult for us to admit the hidden parts of our minds to others because we are afraid to face them ourselves. We assume that others will hate or reject us if they discover our dark side. We are sometimes more ruthless towards ourselves than others are towards us. If we dare to tell a trusted friend about our own issues, we begin to understand ourselves better. Talking clarifies things.

We only truly learn to know ourselves when we open up. The acceptance of others helps us to better accept our own weaknesses. The Bible advises us to confess our weaknesses, difficulties, and sins to one another and to pray for each other's healing. Then healing can begin (James 5:16). “If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). God stands behind His word and comes alongside us to help us. Openness before God always leads to new perspectives.

We need to consider the context in which we share personal matters with others so that we do not offend our listeners.

My daughter went to a dinner organized by her church. At their table sat a middle- aged man who had just experienced a spiritual awakening. He told everyone about the kind of life he had lived before,

including everything related to women and sex. As a nurse, my daughter was used to hearing and seeing all kinds of things at work.

She didn't want to listen to the man's stories, so she interrupted him. Some people confess their sexual indiscretions to their friends in order to relieve themselves of their guilt.

Some people confess their sexual indiscretions to their friends in order to relieve themselves of their guilt. They don't realize that they are burdening their friends' emotions. Genuine confession leads us to repentance, amendment, and detachment from the past.

Communication is the key to friendship

There is a saying: *"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."*
As adults, we know that words can completely destroy friendships.

Building lasting friendships requires:

1. **A positive attitude.** The words of a friend are very important. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). A positive attitude toward other people builds both ourselves and others. A negative attitude, on the other hand, does the opposite.

2. **Understanding the differences between men and women.** Different genders see things from different perspectives. We are different in our structures and experiences. Studies show that different genders see and hear differently. This helps us to better understand the opposite sex. Relationships between women are built on conversations in which they express their feelings. Men, on the other hand, often discuss factual matters in order to get attention and express their needs.

3. **Support and understanding.** When your stressed friend is tired, they may behave badly towards you, even though they are essentially well-meaning. In this case, they need support, understanding, and someone to listen to them so that they can vent their bad mood. It is difficult for them to be themselves at this point.

The ABCs of constructive conversation

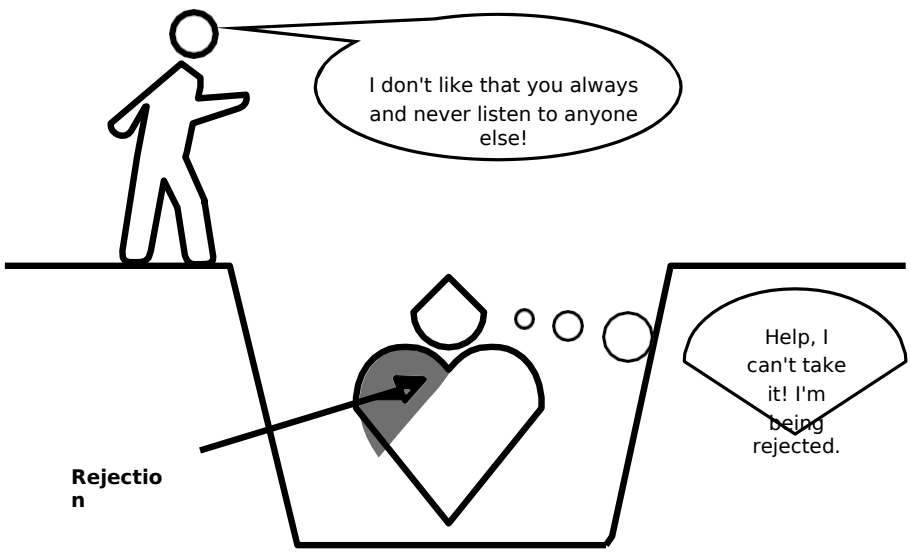
— **Be realistic.** We can all have unrealistic expectations of each other. We are all imperfect human beings. We experience and cause disappointment

to others without meaning to. Expecting perfection is the wrong way to treat others.

— **Learn to rejoice in the differences of others**. We are all unique, for which we can be grateful to God. Differences in others seem exciting and attractive. Over time, we also learn to recognize each other's weaknesses, which can begin to annoy us. When this happens, it is worth asking why these traits annoy us. It may be jealousy, a need to control, low self-esteem, fear, shame, anger, etc. We should face our own difficulties and take them to the cross to be freed from them. "How can you see the speck in your brother's eye, but not notice the log in your own eye? You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:3, 5). Show your friends how unique they are in your life.

— **Listening is part of conversation**. Sometimes the most effective conversation is one in which you are open to listening and slow to speak. Attentive conversationalists sense the emotions behind words, tone of voice, body language, and movements. They maintain eye contact and want to make sure they understand the issue.

— **Deep conversation is hard work.** It builds and connects relationships. Problems related to conversation should be addressed. If we are mature as people, we should accept the challenge of open conversation. This may require patiently resolving conflicts that arise.



Conversation trap.

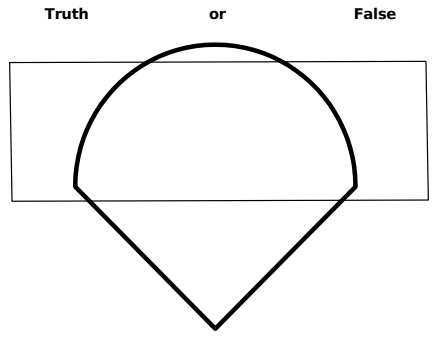
— **Try to avoid talking only about yourself.** The need to control the conversation can be unbearable. It can manifest itself as manipulation, possessiveness, intimidation, criticism, silent treatment, lying, procrastination, etc. This satisfies one's own emotional needs, which often leads to conflict and resentment. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control, not control over others (Gal. 5:23). Competing with others can be an obstacle to conversation and building friendships.

— **God strengthens friendships.** When communication problems arise, praying together helps. With God's help, we can understand each other on an emotional level. He helps us understand each other's needs and feelings.

A mind filled with unresolved and unresolved pain and unmet needs distorts everything we hear.

Everything we see, hear, and experience is "filtered" through our attitudes, beliefs, thought and emotion patterns, and the surrounding culture.

The truth will set us free (John 8:32). We must fill our minds with the truth of God's Word. Ask God to control your life.



The filter of the mind.

— **Express your positive feelings toward your family and loved ones in words.** We all need love expressed in words, shared hobbies, and meals together. Friendship can also be strengthened by sending greetings or expressions of appreciation.

— **Flattery is not part of genuine friendship.** Expressions of courtesy are not always reciprocal. Your affection does not necessarily bind the other person to you. Be honest. Express every positive feeling you have towards the other person.

— **Friends and expectations – the joy of life.** Our happiness is the result of our own inner work. Problems arise when we shift the responsibility for our happiness and success outside ourselves.

— **Comparison and friends** (2 Corinthians 10:12). Many have been

taught to compare themselves to others. Comparison has no place in friendships.

— **Competition and friends.** Competitive games are part of childhood and youth. If competition arises in a friendship, both parties lose. The Bible asks us to compete only in “honoring one another.”

— **Accusations and criticism** (James 5:9; Col. 3:21; 2 Cor. 4:2). Everyone must take responsibility for their own life and behavior. If we do not, our friendships will break down and we will betray ourselves. The spiritual growth and development of the accuser will come to a halt. He will interpret his environment falsely. Balance cannot be found by shifting responsibility to others. Spiritual growth and development begin only where accusation ends.

The path of lies: "I do not take responsibility for my behavior."

When approaching another person:

- Open a conversation.
- Find out how the other person is feeling.
- Proceed, stop, or retreat cautiously.
- Always speak positively about people. Let the good circulate and clip the wings of the bad.

Friends are like flowers along the path of life! If you want friends, be a good friend to others!

Friendship involves active listening!

Hearing and listening are two different things.

1. **Hearing:** Gathering information by listening and trying to understand what is happening in the interaction.

2. **Listening:** An empathetic person listens with their heart. They are interested in other people's lives and feelings.

Listening is active:

- There is a time to speak and a time to listen.
- We should be quick to listen, slow to speak (James 1:19).
- “He who has ears, let him hear” (Matt. 13:9, 13–15).
- A hardened heart cannot see, hear, or understand.

God is an exemplary listener!

- God's ears are open, and He hears the cries of His children (Ps. 3:5).
- He inclines his ear toward us (Ps. 116:1–2).
- “Call to me and I will answer you” (Jer. 33:3).
- “The ear that listens to life’s rebuke will dwell among the wise” (Prov. 15:31, NIV).
- “He who answers before listening, that is his shame and his folly” (Prov. 18:13).
- “The discerning seek knowledge, and the ear of the wise is attentive to it” (Proverbs 18:15).
- “A false witness will suffer, but a careful witness will always be listened to” (Proverbs 21:28).

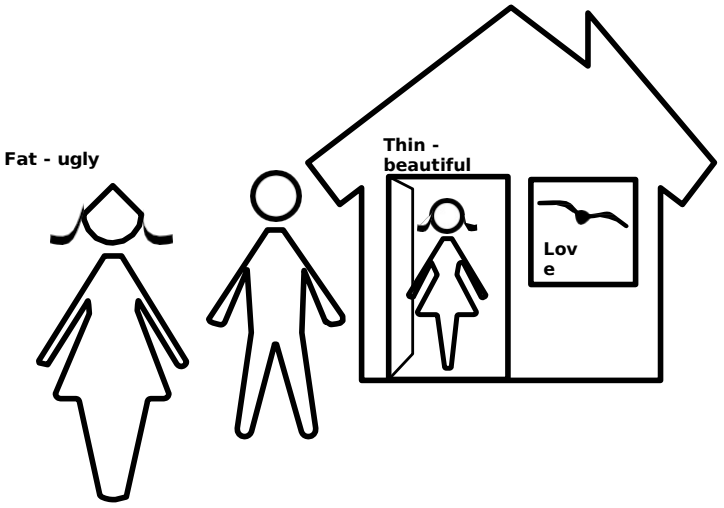
Active listening includes:

- Listen to the other person until they have finished speaking before commenting.
- Accept what you hear.
- Try to understand the speaker's words and feelings, and observe their body language.

- Mutual understanding strengthens close relationships.
- "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5, NKJV).

The importance of attitudes

Our attitudes determine how we behave and how we value the people around us. When I wake up in the morning, I can choose how I treat the people around me. Do I accept them as they are, or am I grumpy and mean to them? Do I bring others down with my negative words and behavior?



Love flies out the window if I try to mold another person into my own image.

We find constructive attitudes to life in the Bible (Phil. 2:3–8):

- Be unselfish.
- Do not seek empty glory for yourself.
- Be humble.
- Consider others better than yourself.
- Do not seek only your own good.
- Seek the best for others as well.
- We must have the mind of Jesus.
- Do not hold on to your rights.
- Serve other people.
- Be faithful to God.

Defining our attitude

Emotions are expressed through behavior, facial expressions, body language, words, etc. Our behavior determines whether we draw others to us or push them away.

Our attitudes reveal whether we are obedient to God, listen to His voice, and obey His word. They also determine whether we are able to grow in our faith. Distorted attitudes blind and deafen us in our relationship with God, ourselves, and the world. We live in spiritual darkness, and the future looks bleak.

Choose today to surrender your life to God and ask Him to help you accept His word and values.

Some people see difficulties in every opportunity in life, while others see opportunities in every difficulty!

— How do you approach life?

— Do you focus on the bright side of life, or do you only look for the bad things in life?

— You will always find what you are looking for, good or bad.

— Are you trapped in dissatisfaction?

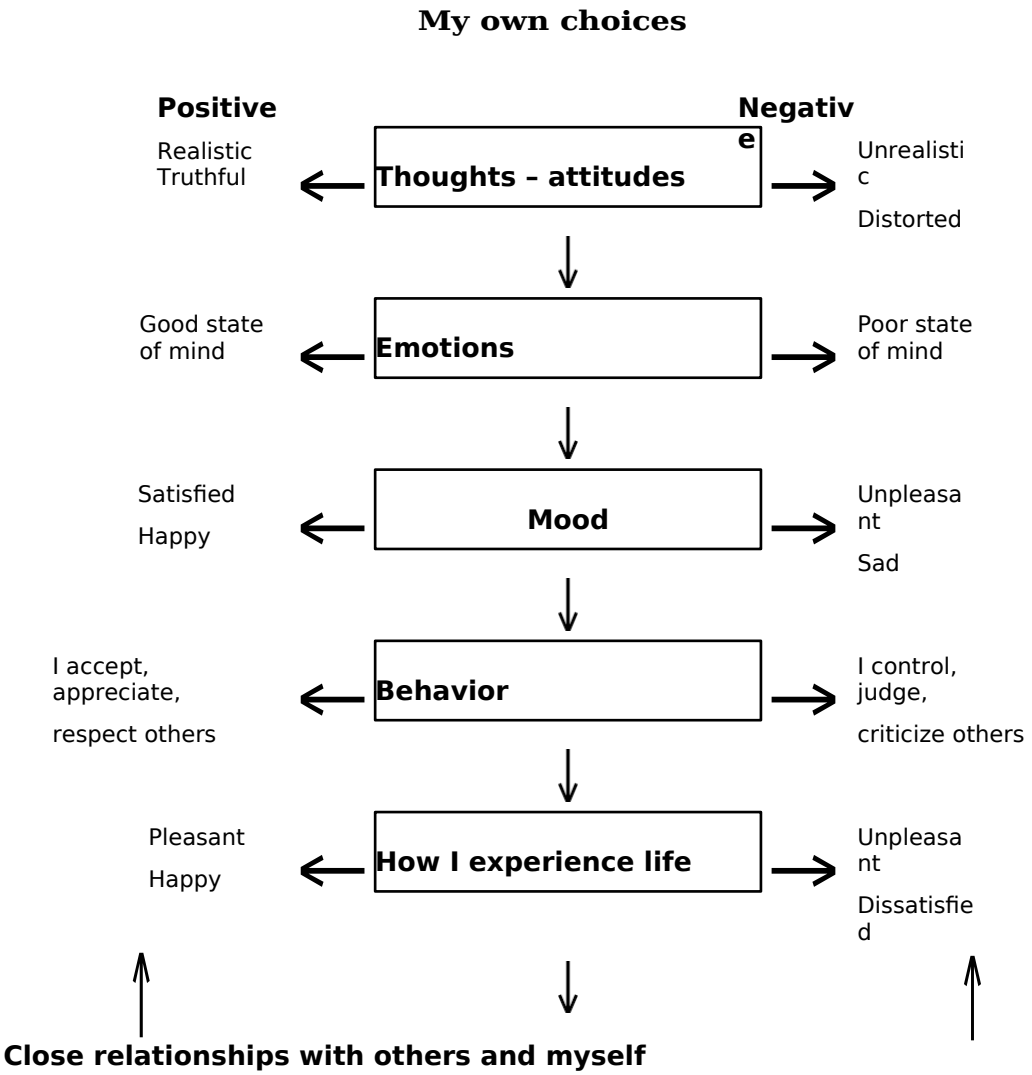
— Ask yourself if you feel that the world treats you badly.

> **“I don’t mean that I am in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can endure everything with the help of the one who gives me strength. Still, you did well to help me in my difficulties” (Phil. 4:11–13).**

Contentment makes a person happy. God has promised to give us the strength we need to endure the challenges of life, if we ask for it.

Our distorted attitudes make our friendships difficult. Accepting others is key. Our attitudes greatly influence our success or failure.

The impact of choices:



A contented and grateful heart is the true elixir of life. We all like friends who are grateful, cheerful, and positive. They are easy to be around!

9

The fruit a tree is known

“You will know them by their fruit. You do not gather grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles. A good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So you will know them by their fruit" (Matt. 7:16–20).

Jesus teaches that people are known by their fruits. Have you dared to examine the fruits of your own life? I have had to do this in my own life. It has helped me grow closer to God. Self-examination is necessary for everyone. Many of us have a distorted view of ourselves. We believe we are better than we really are.

Christians often consider external things to be signs of their Christianity, such as Bible verses or Christian symbols stuck on their cars. But what is their behavior like in traffic? Their behavior reveals them. If God's word has no place in their hearts and does not bear good fruit, external factors are not enough for salvation.

The Holy Spirit shows us what we should do when we ask Him. Reading God's Word daily helps us understand His will. The Holy Spirit wants to enlighten our hearts and help us in our daily lives. The Holy Spirit's task is to dwell in us. With His help, we can be a blessing to others. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches (John 15). Our heavenly Father is the vine dresser. The Holy Spirit is the sap in the vine. The vine dresser cuts away the branches that do not bear fruit and prunes the branches that do bear fruit so that they produce more fruit.

Pruning and cleansing are painful procedures. They are sometimes difficult to understand! However, they are necessary for us to grow into fruit-bearing believers. God wants us to grow. Fruitless branches are useless.

We can choose to love and build up other people with our words, but they can also be poisonous arrows that hurt them. “The tongue of the wise is like a tree of life, but the mouth of the fool will be destroyed” (Proverbs 12:18). Jesus says, “On the day of judgment, people will have to give account for every careless word they have spoken” (Matthew 12:36). Our words are seeds. They have the power to build up or tear down the minds of those who hear them. They produce good or bad fruit in our own lives and in the lives of those around us.

“You will be rewarded according to your words, and your words will determine what you receive. Life and death are in the power of the tongue—as you choose your words, so you will reap the fruit” (Proverbs 18:20–21, NIV).

James (James 3:5–10) also teaches us about the power of language. With our words, we can bless or curse others and ourselves. Constructive words bless, while destructive words curse those who hear them. Good words enlighten those around us, while bad words cause difficulties for others and ourselves.

God wants to help everyone control their tongue. The Bible teaches us that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). What is hidden there will come out in speech sooner or later. The Bible says, "If the root is holy, so are the branches" (Romans 11:16). When our hearts are given to God, our words are also constructive.

Let us examine the fruits of our own lives, our words, and our behavior. When you notice something "rotten" in them, ask the great gardener for help. The gardener will gladly help you.

> **"You did not choose me, but I chose you, and my will is that you set out and bear fruit, fruit that will remain. When you do this, the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name" (John 15:16).**

What character traits describe a good or bad tree, or a healthy or unhealthy close relationship? Are you living in a conflicted close relationship? Is your family indifferent to the consequences of their words?

> **"A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, by their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:18–20).**

Good and bad trees

The Fruit Test (June Hurt, How to Rise Above Abuse – Harvest House Publishers 2010)

This test will help you evaluate your close relationship.

Mark yourself on the left side and your partner on the right side. Circle Y for yes or N for no. The fruit of the Holy Spirit cannot be faked! The Epistle to the Galatians speaks of bad fruit:

> **"But if you bite and devour one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another" (Gal. 5:15). "But the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions" (Gal. 19–20; NKJV).**

I	**You bite and devour one another**	Another person
K – E	Sharp, heart-wounding words.	Y – N
	You feed off each other	
K – E	Dominant behavior – self-esteem crumbles among those close to you.	Y – N
	Hostility	
K – E	Behavior that is contemptuous or resentful toward another person.	Y – N
	Quarrel	
K – E	The dispute ends in tension, fighting, open conflict, even violence.	Y – N
	Jealousy	
K – E	Others are seen as competitors who must be eliminated by any means necessary.	Y – N
	Hatred	
K – E	Inability to control one's own anger. Anger easily takes over. This can lead to threatening situations.	Y – N
	Scheming or selfishness	
K – E	Satisfying personal needs and desires even through scheming, without regard for the needs of others.	Y – N
	Sects – partisanship	

K	Causing disagreement with others. A strong need to be right at the expense of unity and harmony (John 17:21).	Y – N

Fruits of the Holy Spirit

What does the Holy Spirit bring when we make room for him in our hearts?

> **“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22, 23).**

I	**Love**	Another person
K – E	The desire to act for the good of others and make them happy.	Y – N
	Joy	
K – E	Inner joy is independent of life's challenges.	Y – N
	Peace	
K – E	Calmness is maintained in the midst of difficulties and trials.	Y – N
	Patience	
K – E	Difficulties are endured calmly without complaining.	Y – N
	Kindness	
K – E	Genuine help and care from a kind heart.	Y – N
	Goodness	
K – E	Morally mature character and pure-hearted reverence for God.	Y – N
	Faithfulness	
K – E	Faithfulness in work and relationships.	Y – N
	Gentleness	
K – E	Respectful and moderate behavior towards others.	Y – N
	Self-control	
K – E	Self-control and discipline. No need to control others.	Y – N

Ask a trusted friend to tell you how they see you. Try to find out the truth about yourself so that you can respond openly. The Bible says, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance!” (Luke 3:8)

Reasons for emotional abuse

How can he be so cruel? How can he be so insensitive? Why does he talk like that? These are questions that victims of abuse ask themselves. If we understand the answer, we will be better able to evaluate our close relationships. The psalmist says, “Look, you desire truth in the innermost being, and you teach me wisdom in my secret heart” (Ps. 51:8, NIV). It is important to remember that people who are deeply hurt often hurt others without realizing it.

What kind of family or upbringing produces people who exploit the emotional lives of others? Has anyone ever mentioned that your way of speaking might be offensive? If so, would you like to change? In order to heal from the wounds of the past, you must accept the painful events of your past. Try to understand how your own vulnerability has affected your close relationships. Today, you can choose to face the areas of your life that need healing or refuse to face them. If you refuse, you will remain a prisoner of your past. At the same time, you will subconsciously continue to control or subjugate those close to you based on the wounds of your past.

The enemy of the soul plants lies in every wound of the heart. Lies make our lives difficult. For example, when the mother of a small child falls ill and someone else takes care of the child, the child feels abandoned and believes, "*There is something wrong with me because my mother left me.*" It is not easy for a child to live with this lie. The lie should be exposed as early as possible. Only the truth can set you free. People who have been set free grant freedom to others as well. If you choose healing, strive to face every pain in your life once more. Choose forgiveness and lay your pain at the foot of the cross and leave it there. Hold on to the following words from the Bible and say them aloud often: “Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed. Help me, and I will be helped. I will praise you alone!” (Jer. 17:14)

The past of hurtful people

Evaluate your childhood years.

— What were your relationships like with your family members and relatives before you started school?

— What kind of friendships did you have during your school years?

— What about your friendships during adolescence?

— What feelings do you remember from your childhood and youth?

— Were you generally sad, happy, angry, or afraid?

The following list may help you remember things from your childhood and adolescence:

— I experienced hurtful behavior from my father and/or mother (yelling, mocking, name-calling, unreasonable punishment).

— I felt different from other children (I had to take on responsibilities at home at too young an age and was unable to play carefree).

— My schoolmates belittled, bullied, and called me names.

— I learned to hide all my feelings (permanent pattern).

— I learned from my parents how to control myself.

— I had no safe haven, no one I could trust to express my feelings to.

— I interpreted my life situation as normal, but later I realized that it shouldn't have been that way.

— I didn't know how to deal with my suppressed feelings of anger (I am aware of them, but I don't dare to face them).

— Because I have not confronted my own feelings, I lack sensitivity towards other people's feelings.

Perhaps you can relate to David's experience: "I was overwhelmed by grief and sorrow" (Ps. 116:3). If you experienced abuse or violence in your childhood, you are prone to continue the same pattern with your own children. However, this pattern can be broken if you really want to.

All abusive people have themselves been victims of such behavior in their own childhood. The Bible says, “Anxiety breaks the spirit” (Prov. 15:13; self-esteem and identity are broken). In a healthy close relationship, both partners have a clear picture of their own identity. Without this, it is difficult to maintain a functional and constructive relationship. A close relationship is not always a smooth path; there are hills, bends, and dips. Its purpose is to provide a safe and reliable environment where you can show intimacy to each other. Commitment to God gives a person the strongest identity.

Immature people in close relationships are unable to understand each other or build a strong relationship. Skewed boundaries are the result of skewed family values.

It is painful for a child if their basic needs are not met. These needs are built into us by God, including the need to experience love, security, belonging, and meaning. These unmet needs remain with the person into adulthood. In close relationships, these people expect or demand that their spouse fulfill these needs. This can be quite difficult for the spouse. Such a person may try to fulfill their needs in some distorted way (through extramarital relationships, various addictions, etc.).

Beliefs held by victims: *"I am responsible for how people treat me. I believe that I am a bad person and that is why I am pressured and oppressed. I believe that bad things will always happen to me. If I were better, people would treat me better. I believe that I can't do anything about how people treat me."*

The truth sets you free!

It is important to understand that many beliefs are false. It is not the child's fault that they were treated badly as a child. The belief that another person in a close relationship will make me happy is incorrect. I can indeed choose my reaction to bad treatment. I don't have to commit myself to someone who treats me badly. I don't believe that my change will change the bad behavior of another person. I no longer want to seek the approval of others. Instead, surrendering to God's guidance is the wisest thing to do. He is able to fulfill my inner needs. God has assessed my worth. He loves me unconditionally just as I am. God can fulfill all my secret needs when I entrust them to His care.

> **"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10, NIV).**

How can you overcome verbal abuse?

Is there any hope for those who have been beaten with words? Getting rid of hurtful words is neither easy nor quick. It requires inner effort, forgiveness, prayer, and surrendering the pain to God. Often we need the liberating prayer of another person for support.

Those who want to control you and try to subdue you with their words are not as strong as they want to appear. If you are the target of an inappropriate outburst of anger, you need to understand that their attack is not directed at you but at themselves. The origin of their insensitive attacks is a painful heart. They have had a difficult past. Now they choose to respond by directing their anger at people who are outside their problems. The Bible gives us advice on how to behave.

> **“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and evil thoughts. Be kind and gentle to each other, and forgive each other, just as God forgave you through Christ” (Ephesians 4:31–32).**

How do you respond to a verbally abusive person?

— Tell them that you are concerned about them. For example: *“I want to be there for you.”*

— Tell them how their behavior hurts you. For example: *“It hurts me when you talk to me like that and use that tone of voice.”*

— Tell them that you want a positive relationship with them. Make it clear to them that you will no longer accept verbal abuse. For example: *“I want to support you, but I can’t tolerate verbal abuse.”*

— Tell him the truth without judging him. For example: *"I want to continue our relationship, but if you don't value me, then we have no foundation for our relationship and I want to distance myself from you."*

The Bible says:

“A prudent man gets a reputation for wisdom, and skillful speech wins favor” (Proverbs 16:21).

“Our fathers trusted in you; they trusted, and you delivered them” (Ps. 22:5, NIV).

Trust in the power of prayer!

Remember

— God cares for you and your family better than you ever could.

— Prayer is the surest path to healing and wholeness.

— We must pray for healing for all parties involved.

— Thank God for everything He teaches you in difficult situations in life.

“Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances. For this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:17–18, NIV).

10

Two paths to

“Enter through the narrow gate. Many people go through the wide gate and take the easy road, but it leads to destruction. How narrow is the gate and how difficult is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it!” (Matthew 7:13–14)

Jesus speaks of two different paths that we can choose.

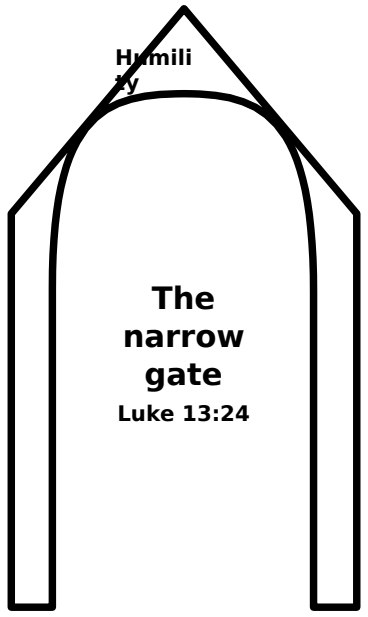
1. The broad road leads to destruction.

2. The narrow road leads to eternal life (Luke 13:24).

The broad road has room for all kinds of carnal pursuits (Rom. 8:5–7) such as bitterness, unforgiveness, stubbornness, anger, rebellion, lust, idolatry, etc. The narrow path has room only for those who allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. The desires of the Spirit produce life and peace (Rom. 8:6). It is easy to choose the broad path because the desires of the flesh are directed toward it. Ultimately, it leads to eternal death. The fleshly mind is at war with God and does not want to submit to God's will.

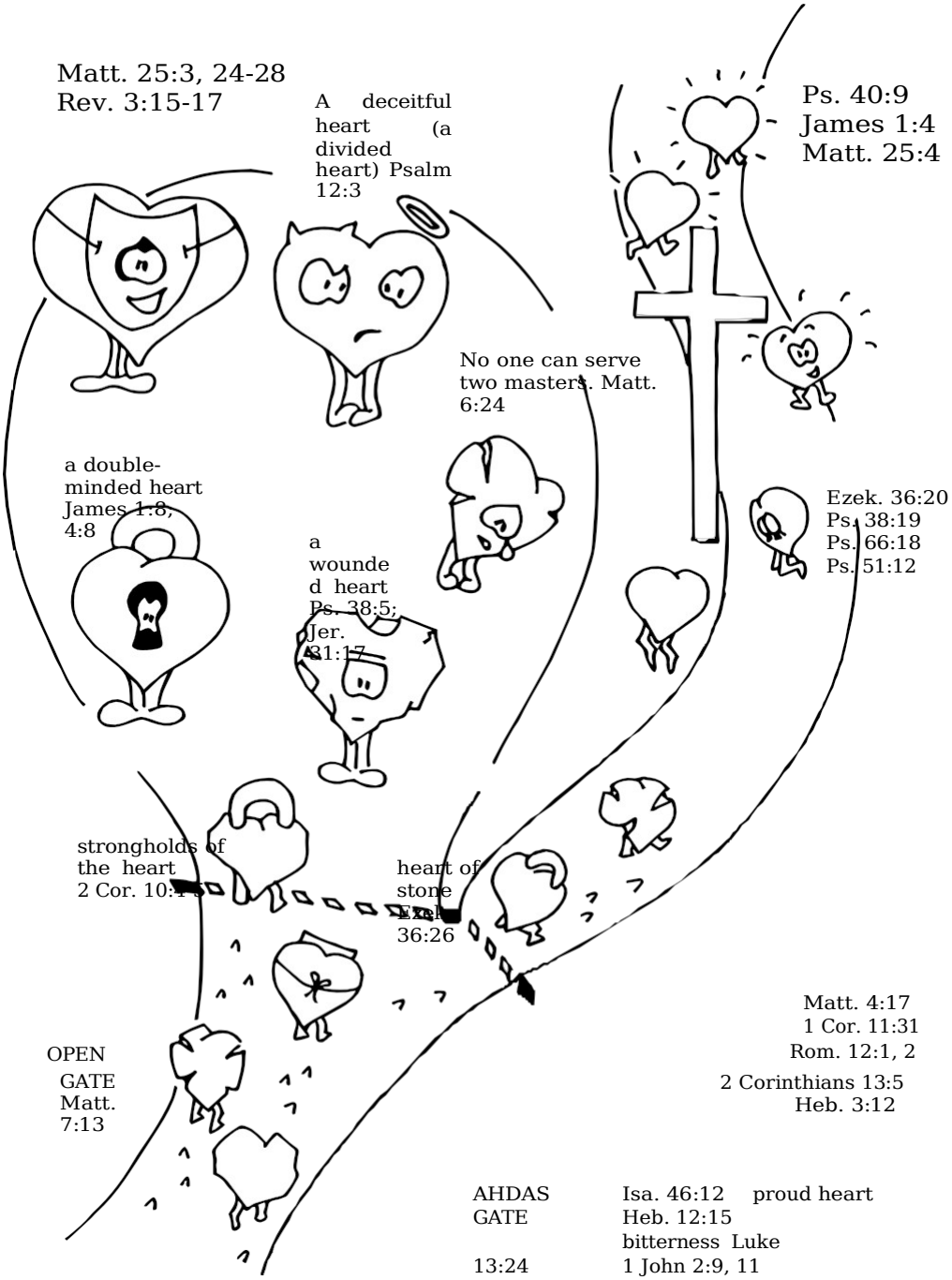
It is much more difficult to choose the narrow path because it requires humility and repentance. Ultimately, however, it leads to eternal life. Often our emotions tempt us to choose the path that seems easy to walk and feels good at the moment. Sin is tempting.

Wisdom guides us to choose the path that seems difficult at first, but later we realize that it leads us to life, because the truth sets us free.



The wide and narrow gate

(Matt. 7:13-14)



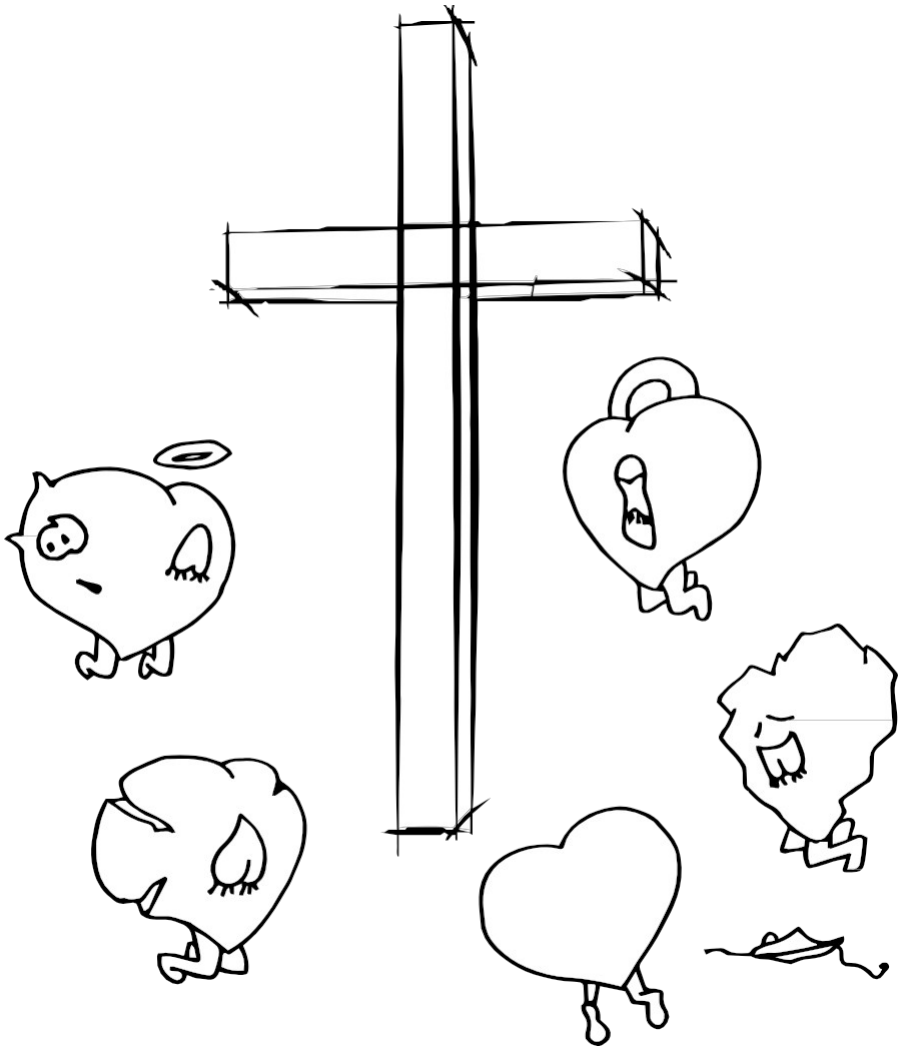
Ps. 73:6 pride - violence

Gal. 5:19-21 works of the flesh

Humble yourselves and repent!

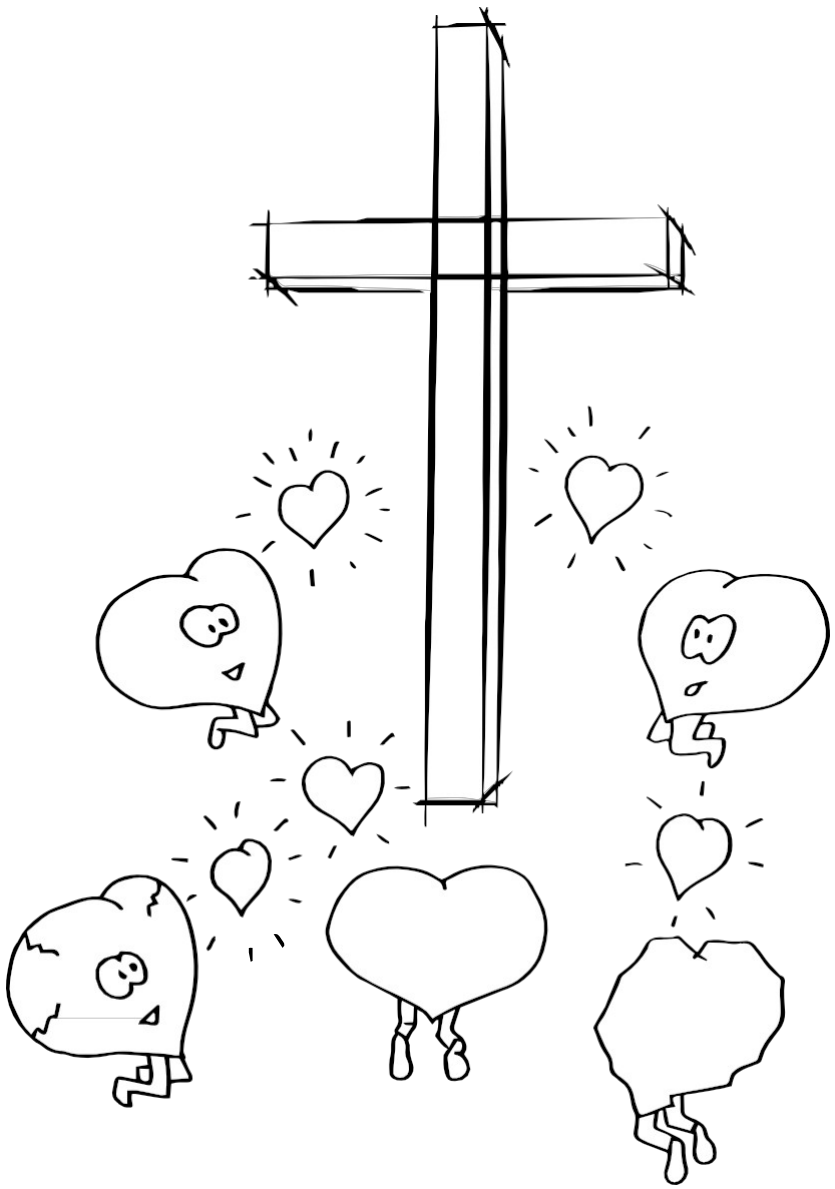
(1 Cor. 1:18; Phil. 2:7, 8; 1 Pet. 5:6)

Jesus humbled himself



- Recognize and name your own difficulties. When you do that, you will begin to gain control over them.
- Admit that you have sinned.
- Repent and reject sin in your life.
- Forgive everyone who has hurt you.
- Accept God's forgiveness.

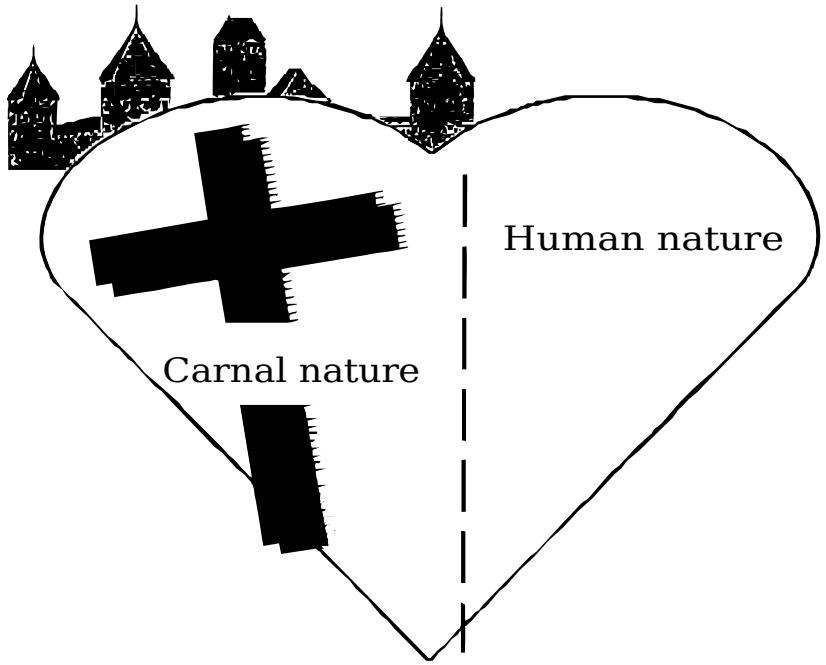
“I will give you a new heart”
(Ezekiel 36:26)



“God, create in me a clean heart and renew me, give me a strong spirit”
(Ps. 51:12)

Talk of the cross

is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the POWER OF GOD (1 Cor. 1:18).

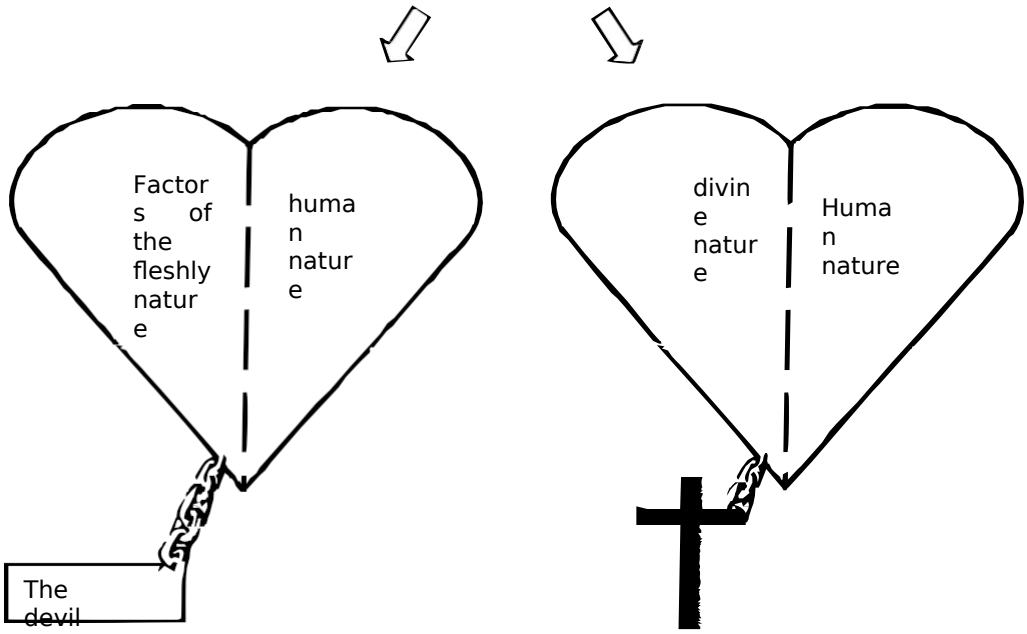


Strongholds in the heart: wrong habits, beliefs, values, thought patterns, emotions.

Gal. 2:20: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
Gal. 5:24: "Those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified their old nature with its passions and desires."
Col. 3:3, 9, 10: "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Do not lie to one another. You have stripped off your old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator." **Romans 6:6**: "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."

Crucify your fleshly nature!

My own choice



Fleshly nature
Rom. 8:6–8
Rom. 7:4–14
Matt. 7:17
John 8:34, 44, 47
Eph. 2:1–2

The factors of human nature
Rom. 1:3

Factors of divine nature
2 Peter 1:3–4
1 Peter 1:2–4
John 1:12
Rom. 6:13–14
Rom. 12:2
Titus 2:11–12
John 15:4–5
Rom. 5:1–2
Eph. 3:16–17

Risto grew up in a religious family and gave his life to God at a young age. He enjoyed music and was talented at it; at the age of 17, he started playing in a band. At first, they were asked to play at weddings, funerals, birthdays, and other events. Gradually, the band's reputation spread, and they were also asked to play at dance halls, nightclubs, and other venues. Risto was full of enthusiasm and loved his profession, but his relationship with God suffered. He no longer had inner peace. Finally, he rejected God. He married a nightclub waitress, much to the sorrow of his parents. The marriage was difficult, and guilt weighed heavily on his heart. They had two daughters. They hoped that their children would bring happiness to their lives. That did not happen. His wife found herself a lover. Many difficulties in life led them to pray to God for help, because they saw no way out of their problems. They both gave their lives to God and sought a "spiritual home" for themselves. Risto gave up light music altogether. He decided to study to become a pastor and wanted to help young people find the kind of peace that the world cannot give. He was a beloved pastor. He only had time to work as a pastor for a few years before he suffered a stroke at the age of 36 and died. The doctors did their best, but help came too late. How fortunate that he returned to God.

Sin is cunning. It wants to trap us in its chains and blind our eyes so that we cannot see where we are going. However, pain is a good teacher. It can break our pride and reveal the lies we believe.

Dear friend, whom do you want to serve, and where do you want to spend eternity?

God is always ready to help you find the right path in your life.

"But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to become children of God, to all who believe in his name" (John 1:12).

11

Sin in the heart

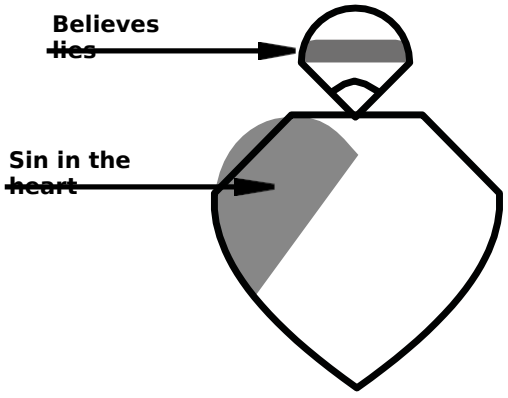
“Sin whispers in the heart of the wrongdoer so that he no longer fears God. Sin captivates his eyes so that he cannot see or hate his faults. His words are evil and deceitful; he rejects wisdom and acts wrongly. Even in his bed he plots his schemes. He is on a path that leads astray, and he does not shy away from evil” (Ps. 36:1–5).

If we choose to live in sin or to sin, what consequences will this bring sooner or later?

Read the entire 11th chapter of 2 Samuel. What do we learn from this story? At least one thing stands out: David was not where he should have been. Because of this, he fell into sin with Bathsheba. “In the spring, when kings go out to war, David sent Joab and his men and all the men of Israel to fight the Ammonites. They defeated the Ammonites and began to besiege Rabbah. David himself remained in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 11:1). David's place should have been on the battlefield, not in Jerusalem. Temptations increase with abundant free time. How is it in your life? Do you seek to follow God's guidance to be in the right place at the right time? Ask God to help you. God wants you to be as far away from sin as possible so that you can receive the blessings He has reserved for you.

blessings He has in store for you.

David committed adultery with Bathsheba. He devised a plan to secretly kill her husband in order to conceal his sin. Time passed, and David no longer cared about the matter; after all, he was king and could do whatever he wanted. Like all those who fall into temptation, he felt the need to justify his actions. How deceitful that is! We may not have committed the same sin as David, but sins always have consequences. We must first admit our sins, confess them, and repent of our actions. Without this, we cannot serve God with a pure heart and a clear conscience. As a result of his sin, King David lost the joy and blessing of his life. This is described in Psalm 32 (1–7).



If sin dwells in the heart, it says, “Do not fear God” (Ps. 36:2). Sin manifests itself as unforgiveness, pride, selfishness, anger, bitterness, lust, envy, lies, stealing, etc.

— If we allow sin to dwell in our hearts, it speaks to us and uses our mouths. In a fit of anger, we may say things that we ourselves later wonder about and are ashamed of.

— Sin blinds us so that we cannot see our own faults (Ps. 36:3). We see our own problems in others. “As water reflects the face, so one’s heart reflects the heart” (Prov. 27:19). “Why do you see the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?” (Matt. 7:3).

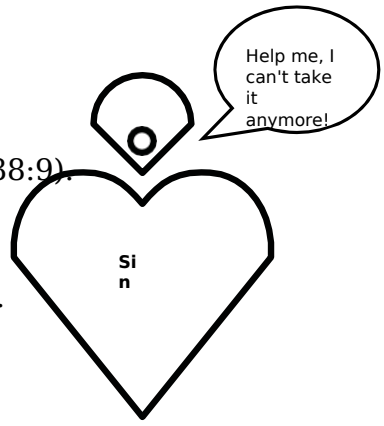
— Words inspired by sin are always bound up with lies. When sin speaks through our mouths, our words can be truly hurtful and deceitful.

— Sin rejects wisdom and acts wrongly (Ps. 36:4).

— “He is on a path that leads astray; he does not turn away from evil” (Ps. 36:5).

— “The wicked will be destroyed, and the ungodly will be destroyed” (Ps.
37:38).

- The burden of sin is heavier than I can bear (Ps. 38:5).
- It is too heavy for me to bear.
- I am bent over.
- I am twisted out of shape.
- From morning till night I am overwhelmed by grief (Ps. 38:7).



- My heart cries out in pain (Ps. 32:3; Ps. 38:9).
- My heart trembles.
- My strength is fading.
- The light in my eyes is fading (Ps. 38:11).

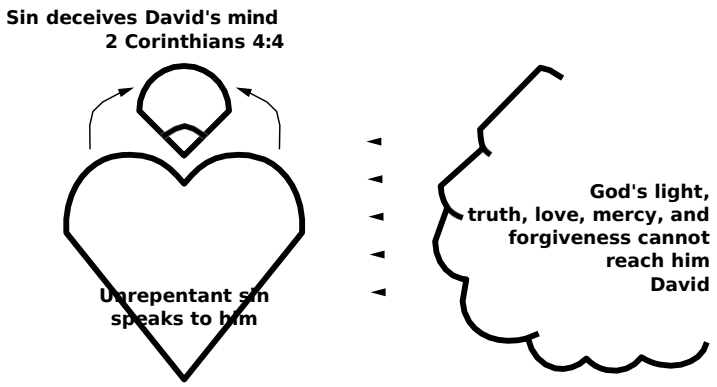
I have seen many people whose whole bodies have suffered greatly from the consequences of sin. The roots of many of our illnesses are found in the sins that dwell in our hearts.

Bitterness
Unforgiveness
Deceit in the heart

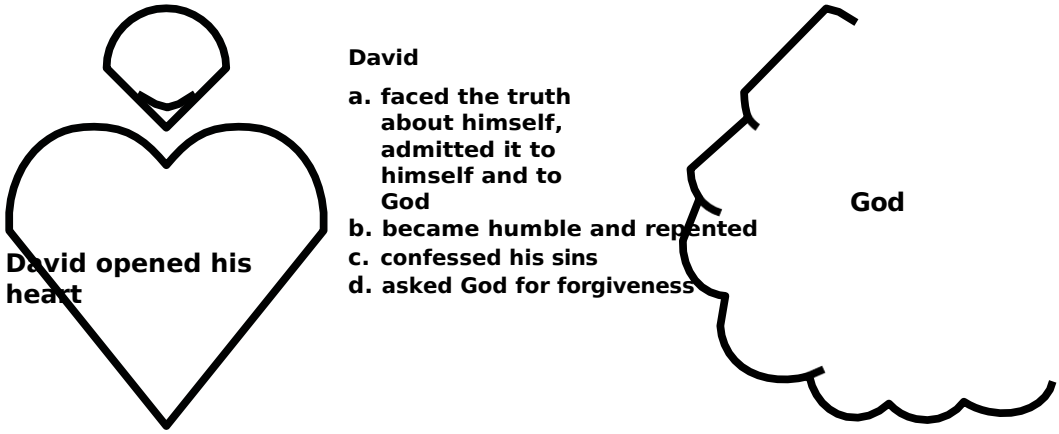
→

- My body wasted away and withered (Ps. 32:3)
- My strength was sapped because of my transgressions; my bones wasted away (Ps. 31:11)
- Because of my evil deeds, my limbs find no rest (Ps. 38:4).

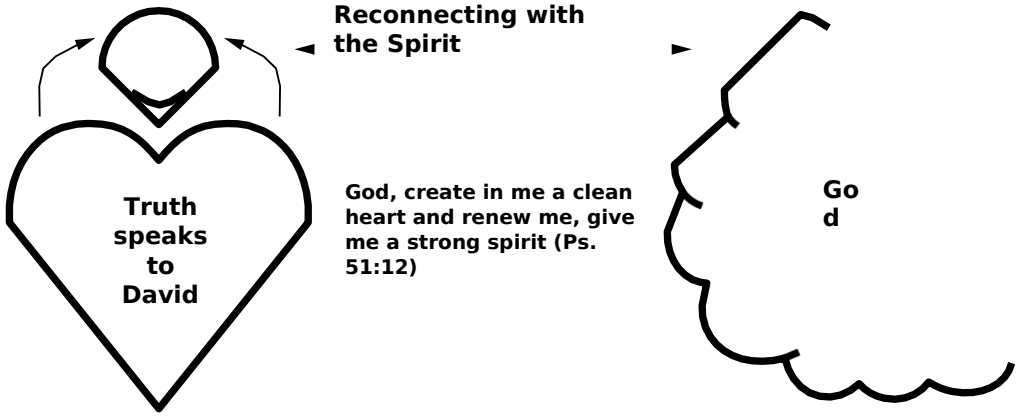
Many people have come to me who have been healed of many illnesses when they agreed to settle their affairs before God (Ps. 107:19–20). God waits lovingly to free us from every burden that binds us. He wants to give us a new and better life. We must open our hearts to him and accept him. “But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to become children of God, to all who believe in his name” (John 1:12). In Psalm 51, David cries out to God and asks for mercy and forgiveness. God approached David in a way that helped him understand the consequences of his actions. I believe it took a year or more before David was ready to write Psalm 51. He probably had not admitted this sin to himself. He did not see himself as God saw him. David had not faced the truth about himself. As long as he resisted facing the truth, he was unable to deeply repent of his transgressions. And as long as he did not deeply repent, he was unable to Because of his actions, he could not receive God's forgiveness.



David's mind, spirit, and body suffer! (Ps. 38:3)


David opened his heart
David
a. faced the truth about himself, admitted it to himself and to God
b. became humble and repented
c. confessed his sins
d. asked God for forgiveness
God

David poured out his heart to God.


Truth speaks to David
Reconnecting with the Spirit
God, create in me a clean heart and renew me, give me a strong spirit (Ps. 51:12)
Go d

- **Truth—God's word healed David's heart and body (Ps. 107:20)**
- **David's spirit was reconnected to the Spirit of God**
- **David's mind was renewed (Rom. 12:2)**

God accepted his repentance and cleansed David of all his iniquity. (1 John 1:9).

Psalm 51 presents us with a very clear message: "You desire truth in the inner being" (Ps. 51:8). If we want to receive God's blessings, we must be completely honest before God about our sins and ourselves. I encourage you not to let sin linger in your life! We all sin, but when we fall, we must quickly learn to confess and repent of our actions.

The Way to Freedom

If you have never confronted your own sins, ask God to help you examine your heart (1 Cor. 11:31).

— Humble yourself before God and admit your sins and mistakes to yourself. Confess to God the sins that the Holy Spirit reveals to you (1 John 1:9; Psalm 38:19; 2 Corinthians 7:9–10).

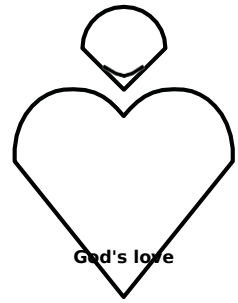
— Choose to forgive all those who have wronged you, hurt you, betrayed you, spoken ill of you, rejected you, etc.

— Ask forgiveness from those you have hurt for the things that the Holy Spirit reveals to you.

— Ask God for a new heart and to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

— Ask God to help you renew your mind (Romans 12:2). Read God's Word and pray every day.

- When God's law is in your heart, your steps will not falter (Ps. 37:31).
- In your mind is truth (John 8:32).
- Behave with respect and service toward God and others.
- The man of peace has a future (Ps. 37:37).



— Is there sin in your heart behind your difficulties?

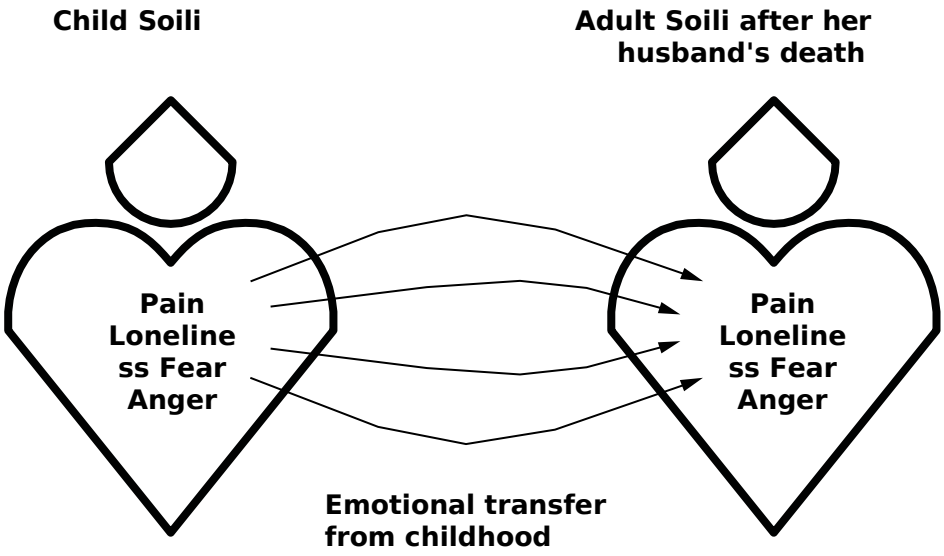
— Do you resist facing the truth in your own life?

— Are you constantly running away from facing some part of your personality?

Encountering Soili. I was once in church when a woman I didn't know sat down next to me and introduced herself: "Today I dared to come and sit next to you." My husband, who was sitting on the other side of me, laughed and said, “I have also dared to live with Mirja for almost 50 years.” Then Soili said that she

Her husband died three years ago, and she still hasn't gotten over it. Then she started crying, got up from her chair, and said to me, "I can't stay here in the church, I'm going outside," and so she left. I walked after her, and we sat down together on a bench. I put my hand on her shoulder, looked her in the eyes, and asked her what kind of home she came from and what kind of childhood she had had. He was surprised by my question. I told him that I was a spiritual counselor and would be happy to help him. He looked me in the eyes and said, "I haven't dared tell anyone about my childhood or my home." I told her, "If you don't face and come to terms with your childhood, you will never be completely free of it." Little by little, she opened up and began to tell me about her father, who had ruled the family with an iron fist. Her father had sexually abused his three daughters. Her mother was distant and cold. She had even hit her adult daughter in the face for no apparent reason. When she later asked her mother why she had done that, she was told, "You were in the wrong place at the wrong time." The answer left Soili completely baffled. Even though Soili was almost 70 years old, the unresolved issues from her childhood still hurt her as much as if they had happened yesterday. I realized that it was not safe to discuss such serious matters here in the churchyard. I suggested to Soili, "Let's go to your home and face your difficulties together." We explored the soil of her heart. In Soili's heart there was unforgiveness and loneliness. Although she was a believer, she did not understand how to get rid of her pain. Sin blinded her, and she could not see her own mistakes. She prayed a lot but received few answers. I talked with her at length and prayed for God's help for Soili. I told her that only forgiveness toward her father would free her from the prison of unforgiveness in which she had been for decades (Matthew 18:34–35). Soili chose to forgive her father, her mother, and many other people whom the Holy Spirit brought to her mind. She did it for herself, to be set free and to receive

forgive us our sins (Matt. 6:14–15).



I then took Soili by the hand and prayed that God would heal the deep wounds in her heart and wash her clean of all injustice through the power of Jesus' blood. I also asked God to reveal Himself to little Soili, who had suffered so much. "And I will love him and reveal myself to him" (John 14:21). I also asked God to bless her, just as Jesus blessed the children while he was here on earth. After our meeting, Soili said she felt much freer and that a burden had been lifted from her shoulders. We met a few more times, and she has blossomed into a joyful Christian. Soili was able to let go of the grief she felt over her husband's death. It was tied to the loneliness and pain she experienced as a child. Before we met, Soili had been running away from her grief and pain. She did not did not dare and did not know how to face them alone.

Because these feelings had not been dealt with, they resurfaced after the man's death, waiting to be resolved and surrendered to God. Only in this way can the heart be healed. "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of

slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

God encourages us today to face all the feelings buried in our hearts that we have been running away from. If necessary, it is good to ask a trusted friend for prayer support. God wants us to stop complaining, blaming ourselves, or putting ourselves down and feeling ashamed of past events. Let us decide to live today and in the days to come rejoicing in every little thing.

God wants us not to waste the time we have been given to live by mourning our losses. For example:

— a childhood that was never lived

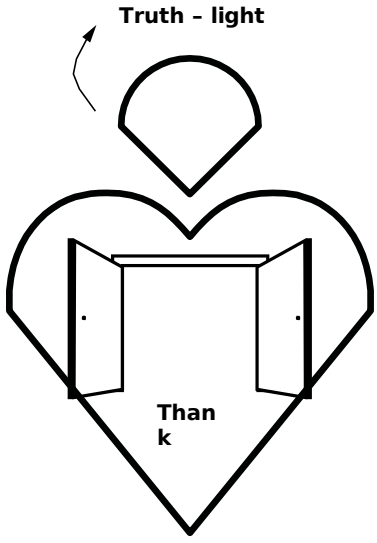
— a broken home

— divorce

— lost health.

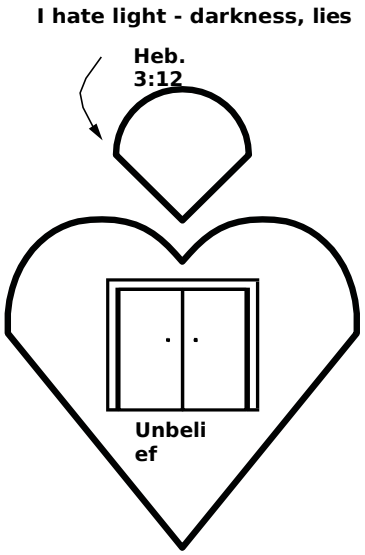
We all need to grieve our losses. It is a process that takes time. Going through the grieving process is normal and part of life. If we allow grief to control our minds for a long time, it tends to turn into self-pity. Decide now not to waste your precious time on self-pity and dwelling on things you cannot change. Instead, decide to live each day looking forward to what God has in store for you as His follower.

God wants us to have a pure heart. The pure in heart “shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).



"Lord, I will give you thanks forever!" (Ps. 52:11).

Thanksgiving and praise open the doors of our hearts to God (Ps. 50:23).

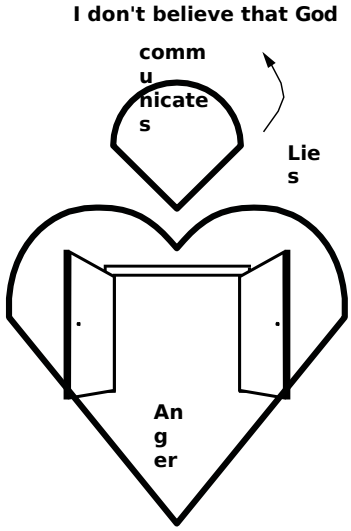


"You love evil more than good, lies more than truth. You love slander and deceit, the language of treachery" (Ps. 52:5,6).

Unbelief closes the doors of the heart.

Unbelief, wickedness, rebellion, grumbling, and evil speech close the doors of the heart to God, but open them to Satan, allowing him to do his evil work (Eph. 4:27; 2 Tim. 2:26).

If we choose to lie repeatedly or steal, have promiscuous sexual relationships, speak evil of others, are arrogant, rude, selfish, etc., such behavior opens the doors of the heart to the devil, and evil spirits gain a foothold in us. It is not always easy to be freed from them (Rom. 12:21; 1 Cor. 15:57).

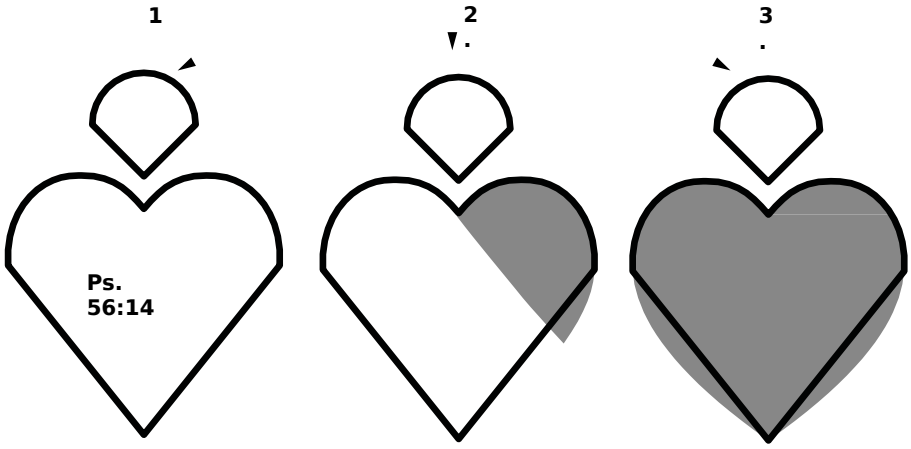


Only deep repentance, amendment, humbling ourselves at the foot of Jesus' cross, and accepting His atoning work can free us from all unrighteousness. Jesus has promised us abundant life if we follow His example (John 10:10).

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness” (John 12:46).

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12; Romans 6:18).

The choice is mine



Sin that I cannot see or do not want to admit to myself

1. Life – light – truth

I follow Jesus' example and give my will to him. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light" (Eph. 5:8–9).

2. Part light – part darkness

I am a believer, but part of my heart is closed to God. “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is necessary for everything to be exposed by the light” (Eph. 5:11, 13).

3. Darkness – lies

I want to follow the desires of my own heart. “Their minds are darkened, and they are alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts” (Eph. 4:18).

We must realize that we do not belong to ourselves. A high price has been paid for us. Therefore, our task is to glorify Jesus in our bodies and spirits. We belong to God. Our love for God must be so deep that our lives and words are in harmony with it. If we live without Jesus in this world, He will live forever without us in the future, better world!

1. **Total surrender to God changes our lives.** I encourage you: give your whole life to God. He wants to fill you every day with His Holy Spirit.

2. **Bad behavior will not change for the better without a change in thinking.** Many are willing to change their behavior but not their thinking patterns. Distorted thoughts lead to distorted behavior. Thoughts that follow God's will lead to constructive behavior.

3. **The Bible warns against hardening your heart.** It speaks of those whose “conscience is seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2). A hardened person is no longer aware of what he is doing. Those who live with a sensitive conscience are quick to repent of their sins. They do not defend themselves when the Holy Spirit rebukes them.

When God shows us our weaknesses, our wrongdoings, etc., we should say: “God, you are right and I am wrong. Forgive me and help me not to sin again.” Jesus is always ready to help us when we ask Him! (2 Cor. 7:1).

12

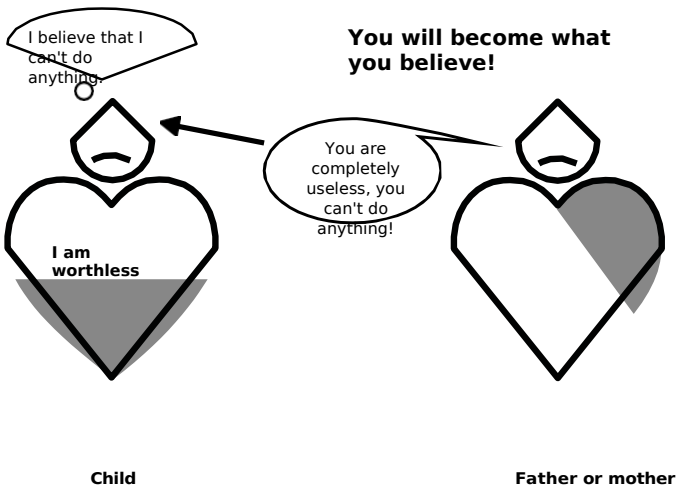
How do you use your words

“The tongue of the wise is like the sharp edge of a sword, but the tongue of the fool is far from wisdom” (Proverbs 12:18).

I have met people who have learned to use their words wisely: building up, encouraging, supporting, loving, uplifting, accepting, comforting, and caring for those around them. How good it feels to be cared for with words.

> *A young woman had experienced difficulties since childhood. We talked about her past. At the end of our meetings, I told her how much good I saw in her. I encouraged her to accept herself, just as God accepts her unconditionally. Gradually, she learned to accept herself and believe that she was valuable. Her outlook on her own future became more positive. She learned to say "no" to people who wanted to take advantage of her in one way or another. The compassion and care of one person was enough to give her life a new direction.*

Harsh words can break another person's will and hurt both their feelings and their spirit. The proverbs in the Bible teach us how to use our words. Our words can give life and warmth to those around us, or they can poison and destroy. We all have the freedom to choose how we use our words. "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21).


I believe that I can't do anything.
You will become what you believe!
You are completely useless, you can't do anything!
I am worthless
Child
Father or mother

Anger that has never been resolved and forgiven is self-perpetuating. By sharing anger with others, it only grows and intensifies.

One morning, our doorbell rang. Standing behind the door was a man, wet with snow, shivering, looking gloomy. I invited him in and asked how I could help. He said, "I need to talk." The man was over 70 years old. After sitting down, he burst into tears. I asked him what was hurting him so much. He told me about his harsh and unfeeling mother, who had broken his heart with her words. He recounted things his mother had said to him decades ago. As he recounted his memories, he cried as if it had happened just yesterday.

I let the man vent all his pain, which burned like fire inside him. After a few questions, he was able to release the pent-up pressure inside him. When he calmed down, I asked what had triggered this situation. The man said that his wife had used the same word his mother used when scolding him for some minor thing. He couldn't take it. It hurt him so much that he took his loaded gun, got in his car, and drove away. He intended to end his life. However, God understood his pain, and the Holy Spirit led him to me. I asked him if he had ever chosen to forgive his mother. As a believer in God, he had not understood the significance of personal forgiveness in life. He had frozen all the hurtful words and feelings he had heard deep in his heart. They lived there, constantly affecting his daily life and beliefs. His spouse unknowingly pushed his subconscious buttons. These deep-seated feelings rose to the surface and were directed at his own wife, ready to destroy their life together. I talked with the man at length and told him that forgiveness was the only way to free himself from his mother's hurtful words and actions. Unforgiveness ties him to his mother and the past, and his own sins also remain unforgiven. He chose to forgive his mother and his wife.

I took his hands and prayed with him: “Dear God, today this man chooses forgiveness for his mother and wife. His heart is open, come and take this pain from his heart and nail it to the cross at Golgotha. Free him from all hurtful words, patterns, attitudes, lies, and negativity, because you, Jesus, died so that

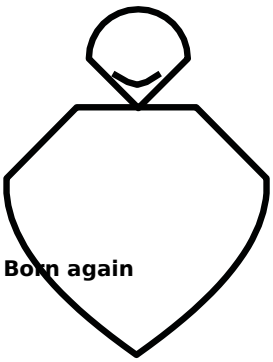
he might live. Create in him a new heart and give him a new spirit. Let him experience the joy that is with you in heaven. Strengthen his faith and give him the will to always choose to follow Jesus. Fill him with the Holy Spirit and bless his family with all the blessings of heaven. In Jesus' name I pray.

We also sorted out other issues in his life according to what the Holy Spirit revealed to him. Little by little, peace descended upon his heart, and he chose to give his life back to Jesus. As he left, he told me about the loaded pistol in his car. He left with a light heart and returned home.

I was left wondering what might have happened if I hadn't been home or if I hadn't welcomed him in. It is comforting to know that our great God takes good care of everything.

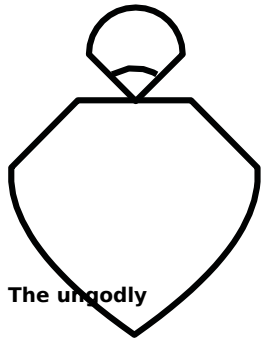
“But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these defile a person” (Matthew 15:18).

God has given us two ears and one mouth. That is why it is important to learn to listen more than to speak.



The heart is humble

The tongue of the righteous expresses a humble attitude toward life: it encourages, shows mercy, speaks the truth, and blesses others. The heart and the tongue are inseparably connected. The mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart.



The heart is proud and selfish

The language of the ungodly expresses prideful and selfish attitudes toward life and reveals lies, envy, anger, judgment, mockery, cursing, etc. How have you learned to use your language?

— We should use our words to honor God and build each other up. However, we often fail, no matter how hard we try. This may be because we have not fully understood the transforming power of God's word when we open our hearts to Him.

— We must continually look to Jesus and ask Him for help and rejoice in His work of reconciliation. Only Jesus can give us the freedom to walk and speak as He desires.

— Learn to take all your difficulties, wrong patterns, the "strongholds" in your heart, the lies you believe, your doubts, jealousy, anger, unforgiveness, and fears to the foot of Jesus' cross. Ask Him to free you from all of them. “Wash away the evil from your heart, Jerusalem, so that you may be saved. How long will you let wrong thoughts rule your mind?” (Jer. 4:14).

— Bind your spirit to the Spirit of God. Bind your will to the will of God. Bind your mind to the mind of God and to the truth. “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

— God is always willing to help, support, and bless you in your struggle with your own language when you humbly ask Him for help. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). The Bible is our map, and the Holy Spirit is our compass, keeping us on the right path.

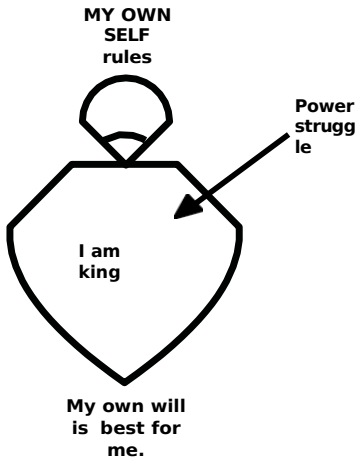
Proverbs	Divine words	Unholy words
10:11	The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.	Violence is hidden in the mouth of the wicked.
10:32	The words of the righteous are words of love.	The speech of the wicked is lies and rage.
12:18	The words of the wise are medicine.	A thoughtless word is like a sword thrust.
13:1	The wise heed their father's rebuke.	The arrogant person does not heed rebuke.
13:3	He who restrains his tongue preserves his life.	A loose tongue leads to ruin.
13:10	The wise listen to advice.	Arrogance leads only to strife.
13:18	Honor those who rebuke you.	The unruly will face poverty and shame.
14:3	The lips of the wise are their guardian.	A fool speaks to his own shame.
14:18	The crown of the wise is knowledge.	Foolishness is the adornment of fools.
15:1	A gentle answer turns away wrath.	An insulting word stirs up anger.
15:4	Encouraging words give courage for life.	A deceitful word breaks the spirit.
21:23	Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps himself from trouble.	**21:24** A boastful man is called a slanderer, and his arrogance knows no bounds.
12:14	A person is rewarded for their words, and their deeds return to them.	**30:14** Woe to those who sharpen their teeth like swords and fill their mouths with biting knives.

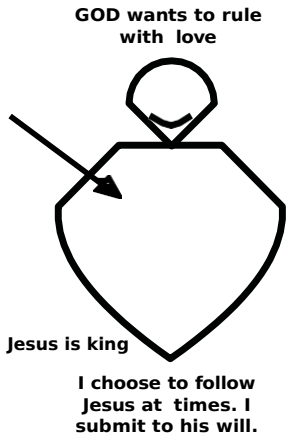
“According to your words you will be rewarded, and according to your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37).

“By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:37).

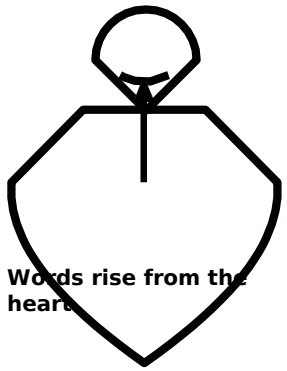
To understand the war that is waged with our words, we must understand the battle that is waged in our hearts. The greatest battle ever fought is the battle with ourselves. Submitting to God's will often requires great effort on our part. Only then can He renew and sanctify our hearts. The difficulties in our hearts are expressed in words.

In every person's heart, there is a battle between two forces. Our hearts are filled with loving, constructive, and merciful words when Jesus is allowed to reign there.





My own self wants to rule with selfishness, but God wants to rule us with love. There is a power struggle between these two. One of them rules our hearts and influences our words.



When God's love rules our hearts, it comes out in our words. Do we work for God's kingdom, sacrificing ourselves and serving others as God's co-workers? "The fruit of the light is goodness, righteousness, and truth" (Eph. 5:9).

The letter of James (3:1–12) tells us a lot about language:

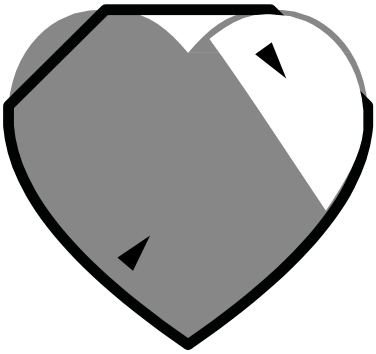
— the tongue is very difficult to tame

— the tongue is unruly and evil

— the tongue is full of deadly poison.

This describes a person whose heart has not been surrendered to God. The kingdom of the self reigns there, or only part of the heart has been surrendered to God's control. "So be careful that the light within you is not darkness. If your whole body is full of light, and no part of you is dark, your whole body will be full of light, as when a lamp shines on you with its radiance" (Luke 11:35–36). How important it is to learn to know the condition of our own hearts! It takes courage to face the sinfulness and filthiness of our own hearts, to learn to understand our own needs, and to ask God for help to experience His saving grace. The Holy Spirit is ready to lead us to see the things in our lives that God would like to change. Our speech reveals how much room the Holy Spirit has in our hearts.

Make room for the Holy Spirit



Full of the world and

"Give us room in your hearts!" (2 Cor. 7:2).
"If we examined ourselves, we would not be judged" (1 Corinthians 11:31).

We must examine God's word daily and pray for strength from heaven so that we can put the word into action in our lives and not just be hearers of the word, deceiving ourselves (James 1:22).

God's Word says, "Let love guide your life" (Eph. 5:2). "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29). We must be obedient to God's word if we truly want to follow Him. "Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps himself from calamity" (Proverbs 21:23). God's word further exhorts us:

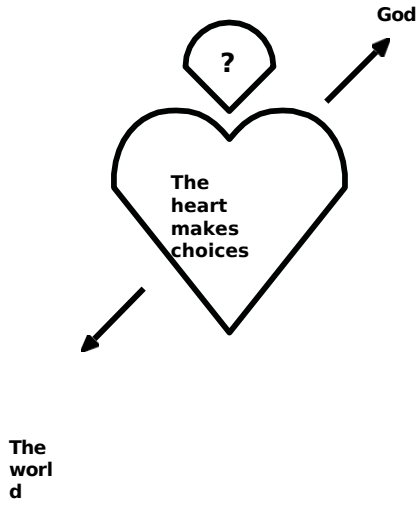
"See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Hebrews 12:15).

God's Word is not given to us merely as a source of information. When it enters our hearts, it has the power to transform our lives from within.

> **"According to its teaching, you must abandon your former way of life and your old self, which is doomed to destruction because of its deceitful desires. You must be renewed in your mind and spirit and put on the new self, created in God's image, to live a holy life in righteousness and truth" (Eph. 4:22–24).**

To be able to do this, we must take Jesus' teaching to heart. "A good person brings good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and an evil person brings evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Luke 6:45).

The Bible uses many words to describe the "inner person"—soul, mind, emotions, spirit, and will. These terms are combined into one big "vessel" – the heart. The term "heart" is perhaps the most used term in the Bible. It means the core of our personality. The heart gives direction to our lives.



The heart makes choices in life – God or the world. For example, "Daniel made a firm decision" (Dan. 1:8, NIV). The direction of his will was voluntary, and as a result, "God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief official" (Dan. 1:9, NIV).

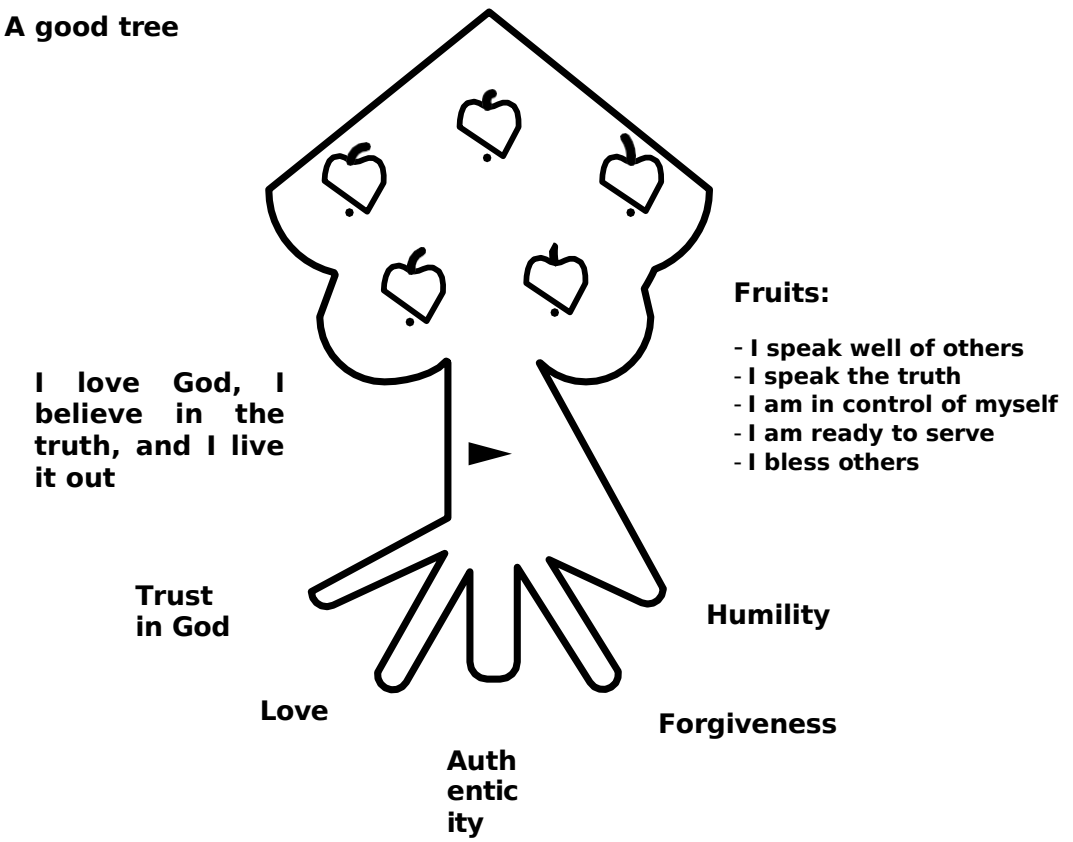
Our behavior is based on how our heart reacts in each situation in our relationships with loved ones, work pressures, etc. Jesus uses the example: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). This is something everyone should consider.

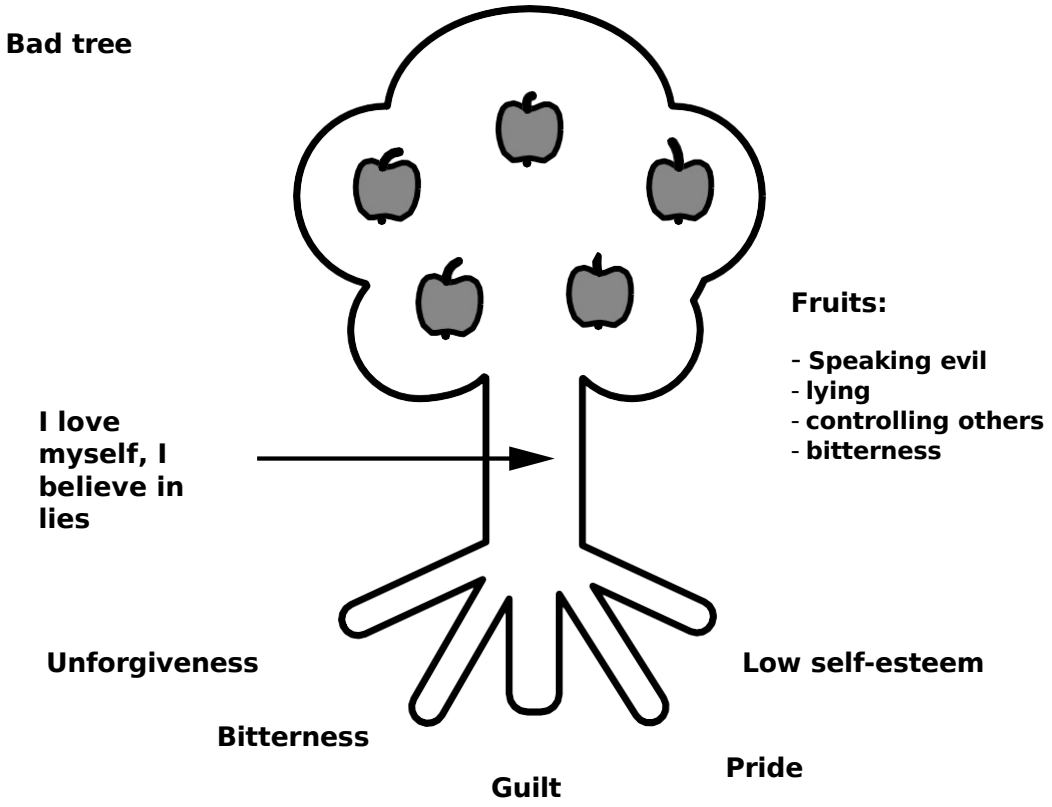
Have you ever said to someone close to *you*, *"I didn't mean what I*

said." This is an easy way out of a difficult situation. It would be better to say, *"I apologize for my words. It was wrong of me to say that to you."* An unkind thought was expressed in words. Jesus took an example from nature.

> **“A good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, by their fruits you will know them” (Matt. 7:17–20).**

How can you best learn to recognize a tree? When you look at the fruit of a tree, you know that it is a fruit tree down to its roots. You cannot plant a cherry tree and expect it to grow apples. Do you see what Jesus wanted to teach us? He taught us the laws of nature. The roots of an apple tree produce apples. The roots of a cherry tree produce cherries. The same law applies in life. What is in the heart comes out of the mouth. The Bible also says, “If the root of the tree is holy, so are the branches” (Romans 11:16). In other words, if the heart is purified and renewed, the words will also be pure, good, and useful, and a joy to the listener.


A good tree
Fruits:
- I speak well of others
- I speak the truth
- I am in control of myself
- I am ready to serve
- I bless others
I love God, I believe in the truth, and I live it out
Trust in God
Humility
Love
Forgiveness
Auth entic ity



Our difficulties often stem from our hearts. I don't know about you, but I have found it difficult to take full responsibility for my own behavior. It is not easy for anyone to admit that our difficulties may be our own fault. Perhaps someone has unknowingly pushed our weak spot, causing anger, a need to control, irritability, or insults to rear their heads in a conversation. We want to believe that our difficulties come from outside ourselves. If you believe this, you will stop seeking God's transforming grace in your own life. We convince ourselves that what we said was caused by what someone else said or did.

Are you ready to look into your own heart and examine your own attitudes, beliefs, values, and lies? Dare to ask yourself, *"What is my problem?"* "Let a man examine himself" (1 Cor. 11:28).

We must understand that war is waged in our hearts and minds. Paavali gives us a brief explanation of this: "And he died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died and rose for them" (2 Cor. 5:15). The effect of sin in our lives

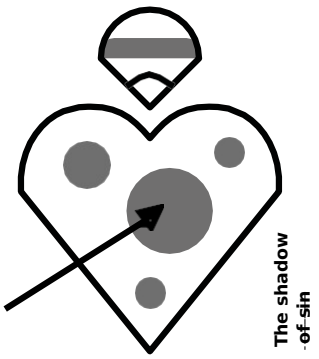
The effect of sin in our lives

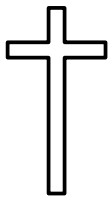
“Sin whispers in the heart of the wrongdoer so that he no longer fears God. Sin captivates his eyes so that he does not see or hate his faults” (Ps. 36:2–3). Sin always does something bad to me:

1. Sin promises more than it can deliver.

2. Sin takes us further than we want to go.

3. Sin costs more than we are willing to pay. Sin
   - — turns my gaze from God to myself,
   - — obsessively strives to get what it wants, is fundamentally antisocial because it demands that we love ourselves more than others,
   - — demands that I care for myself more than others,
   - — it manipulates cunningly and leads to bottomless demands, expectations, and rights,
   - — and makes me constantly want more. Many who have been deceived by it have experienced a collapse in their lives.





Sin blinds us. We cannot see where we are going, nor can we see God's light and love. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105).

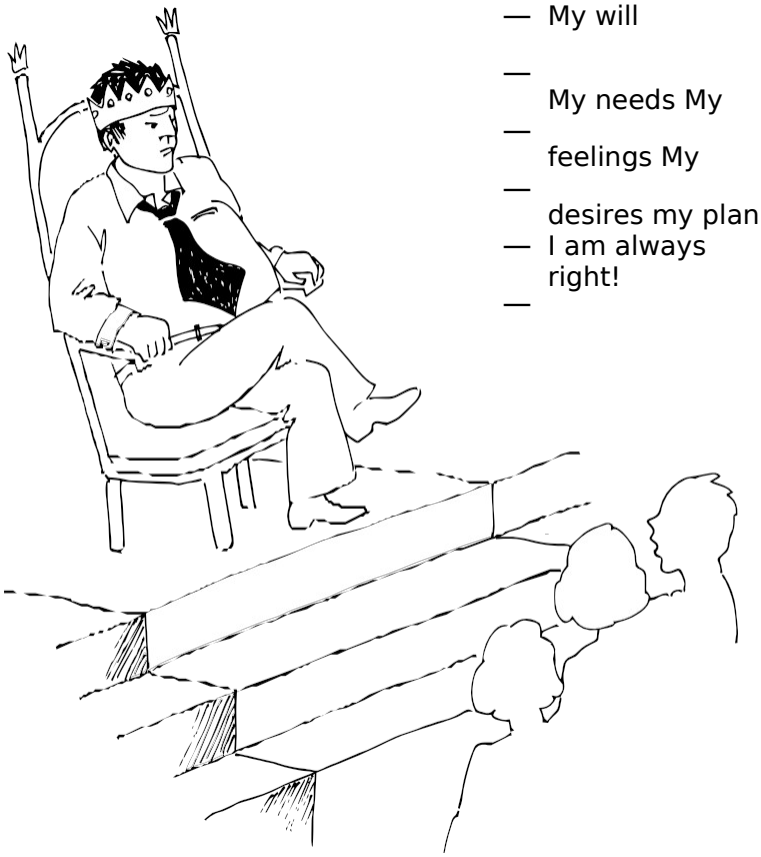
Sin **God's love and light**

“If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. I mean those whose minds the god of this world has blinded, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:3–4).

The Kingdom of the Self

Our natural tendency to sin and our wounded emotions are fertile ground for the autocracy of our own self.

The unwritten law of the kingdom of the self requires everyone to obey and respect me as king. Anyone who does not obey the law will experience various punishments.



The kingdom of my own self

Some attitudes of the kingdom of my own self:

1. I never apologize to anyone!

> *A man under the age of 30 came to me, whose girlfriend had already discussed the matter with me earlier. The girlfriend said that the man had uncontrollable outbursts of anger and rage. He had a habit of overreacting negatively to everyday things. Eventually, his girlfriend made it a condition for continuing the relationship that he seek treatment. Eventually, the man came to see me. I asked him if he had ever apologized to his girlfriend for his behavior. His answer was, "I never apologize to anyone." Their relationship ended in a breakup!*

2. I never forgive anyone!

> *While talking with a Christian lady, it became clear that she carried unforgiveness in her heart. I asked her, "Are you ready to forgive those who have hurt and wounded you?" She replied, "There are seven people in my mind whom I will never forgive!" I asked her, "May I pray that God will give you the strength to forgive and free you from the burden of unforgiveness?" During the prayer, the woman burst into tears and poured out the pain in her heart. After the prayer, as a servant of Christ, I asked her, "Will you choose forgiveness today and the freedom that comes with it?" She chose to forgive each of the seven people who had hurt her deeply. God began a great process of transformation and healing in her heart, which greatly amazed her husband and close relatives.*

3. I don't tell anyone what's in my heart.

A husband invited me and my husband to his home because his wife was having various communication difficulties. The wife refused to let her husband get close to her emotionally. I was left alone with the lady. She knew that her husband had invited me over. She said, "I'm not going to tell you anything that's in my heart." Then I began to tell her about the difficulties I had experienced in my own life and how I had overcome them. As she listened to my story, she began to admit, "I have problems like that too." After talking for about three hours, she realized that, despite her decision, she had unwittingly opened up about many things in her heart. We became friends. Nowadays, the lady talks quite freely about her inner struggles. We pray together for them.

4. I'll get angry if you try to approach me.

A businessman came to me for a massage. He had moved away from home and was suffering from severe back pain. I asked him, "Could your back pain and your home problems be related?" The man replied angrily, "Don't even try to approach me!" I continued talking, trying to understand his strong rejection. I told him about myself: "I don't let everyone get close to me either, unless I'm sure they'll understand me. It seems that women have hurt you badly. I don't intend to hurt you any more." Tears welled up in his eyes, and he began to open up. We took his case before God together. He returned to his wife and made peace with her. On his last visit, he said, "If someone else had tried to discuss such deep issues with me, I would not have agreed. Now, however, I have gotten rid of my disappointments and anger, and life seems to have opened up in a new way for me."

5. If you try to exploit my weaknesses, I will fight you.

A man came to talk to me because his wife had left him with the children. I tried to find out the reasons for the separation. The man said that no one should interfere in his personal affairs. He was open and honest when recalling his own childhood, which he had spent with little contact with his father. His father worked in another country and only visited home once every two years, spending about a month with his family. When he was home, he was extremely violent towards his children and wife. The man's role model as a husband and father was thus weak. His mother also died when he was 16 years old. It later emerged that his father had started a new family in another country. The man's defense mechanism was: "Don't even try to approach my weaknesses and shortcomings, or I will defend myself." As a spouse and father, he was unable to fulfill his role.

The wife was the youngest of five children and the only daughter. She had a secure relationship with her father and protective brothers who loved her dearly. She waited in vain for her husband to behave in the same way, and grew tired of waiting. She left with her two children. During our counseling sessions, the man began to understand himself and his wife's reactions. He dealt with the painful disappointments of his childhood and accepted Christ into his life. The woman also came to talk with me and forgave her husband. The family returned home. Both of them wanted to serve God and pray together for guidance in their lives.

6. If you do not submit to my will, I will punish you with hurtful words.

7. If you don't do what I say, you will get into trouble.

8. If you don't behave the way I want you to, I will reject you.

9. You must think the way I think, because your thoughts are

always immature and wrong.

10. Never say anything negative about me. I won't accept it, and I'll get angry.

11. I don't want to change anything about myself. If you don't accept me as I am, you can leave me. I don't need you.

12. I manage our finances the way I want, and you have no say in the matter.

13. I do what I want, and it's none of your business (e.g., spouse or children).

Here are a few examples and phrases I have heard while caring for hearts broken by sin.

The Kingdom of God

Only people whose hearts are under the transforming and purifying influence of the Holy Spirit are capable of building this kingdom. This process continues throughout life.

The kingdom of God is ruled by love. There, people respect and serve one another.

Jesus is an example of this. He came to serve.

“Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

I surrender my mind, my will, my feelings, my heart, my spirit, and my life to God. This gives me happiness and peace in my heart. He has promised to take care of all my needs. Only through this surrender can I grow as a servant of God.

> **“If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:30).**

Galatians chapter 5 helps us understand the conflict between our own selves and God's kingdom.

> **“You have been called to freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an excuse to indulge your selfish nature; rather, love and serve one another. The law is clear, and it must be obeyed: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another. I mean this: let the Spirit guide your lives, so that you do not fulfill the desires of your flesh, your selfish nature" (Gal. 5:13–16).**

We should never say words that are harsh, judgmental, or selfish. Our words have power. It is not wise to use words in the following way: *"Yes, I was angry and yelled at my spouse, but he knows that I love him,"* or *"I realize that I behaved badly towards my children, but they know that I care for them."*
Thoughtless words can cause a lot of harm in the lives of those close to us. With our words, we can discourage people, hurt their feelings, and break their hearts. “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

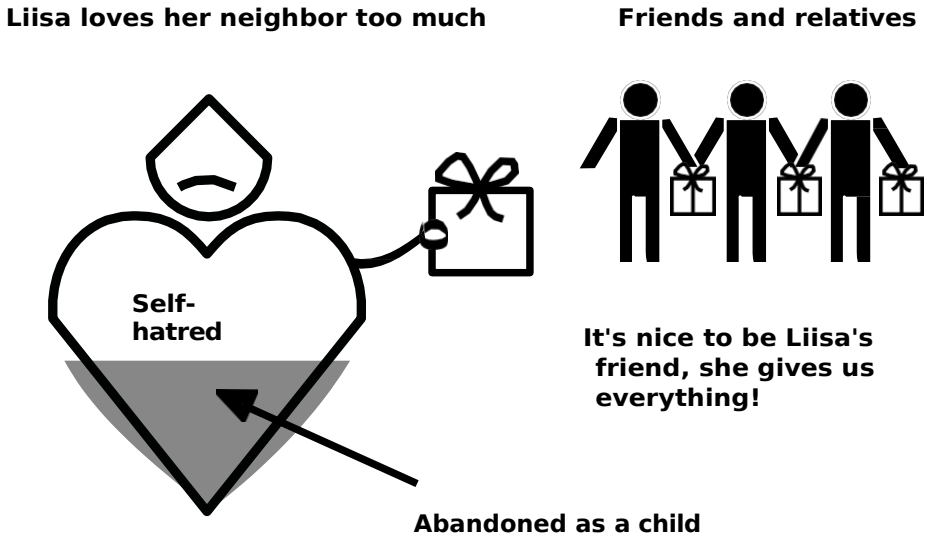
— Have you thought about the impact your words have on people?

— How have you learned to use your words?

I ask you to be completely honest and humble with yourself. If all your words over the past two weeks had been recorded and you were now listening to them, whose kingdom would your words represent? Did your words build your own kingdom? If so, do you use your words as punishment and weapons? Evil words are like foul-smelling breath that we breathe on each other. Or would I have heard you using words of love, honesty, and encouragement?

Paul exhorts us: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:14). We should not love our neighbor more or less than ourselves. It is sometimes difficult for a wounded person to find a balance between the two.

I have met people who were deeply hurt as children. They may have had bad role models in their parents and learned to hate themselves. It has been difficult for them to allow themselves anything, so they have given everything to others in order to punish themselves.



In the end, they are bursting with anger. Being abandoned as a child often leads to self- abandonment, because it feels natural.

How can we break this cycle?

— We must choose to forgive the people who rejected or hated us!

— It is important to face your own anger and other negative feelings and ask God for forgiveness for your self-hatred. This is not always easy. You must learn to accept yourself as God accepts you. Often you will need the help of a friend's prayers!

Rejection experienced as a child can also lead in the opposite direction: self-love grows so great that we cannot see the needs or shortcomings of others and do not want to give anything to them.

Ulla holds on to everything she has. She relies on her possessions.
Loves her neighbor too little
Self-love
We are poor, hungry, and naked.
Abandoned as a child

“I went astray until I humbled myself. Now I obey your instructions” (Ps. 119:67).

— A child sees things through the eyes of a child and considers what they experience to be the truth. But the reality may be something completely different, such as the mother’s illness and inability to care for her child. The child interprets this as the mother abandoning them.

— If another child is born while the first child is still small and helpless, the child feels that they have to compete for their mother's attention. The child feels inadequate if their mother does not have time for them.

— If a mother has to go to work and take her child to daycare, the child does not understand why their mother left them and draws their own conclusions. These conclusions are the child's own truth about the matter. The child is unable to see things from an adult's perspective. Therefore, we must strive to understand our child's world and discuss with them the things that are important to them.

Above all, we must love God and our neighbor as ourselves. This is God's will. When God's love dwells in our hearts and influences

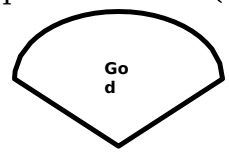
our lives, only then are we ready to love others with divine love.

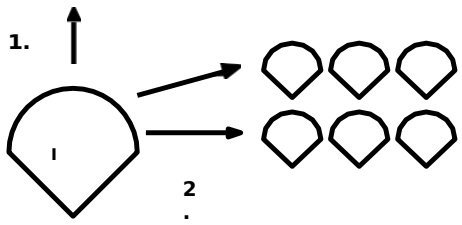
What is God's love like? 1 Corinthians 13:4–8:

> Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy,
> it does not boast, it is
> not proud; it does not behave rudely, it
> does not seek its own, it is not
> provoked, it does not take into account a
> wrong suffered,
> It does not rejoice in injustice but rejoices
> in the truth. It endures all things, believes all things,
> hopes all things, suffers all things.
> Love never fails.

Love that dominates, manipulates, accuses, controls, or threatens does not come from God, but from a heart that is partly under the power of darkness. If we want a guard on our lips, we must put our relationship with God in order. “As God’s fellow workers, we urge you: accept God’s mercy, so that it will not be in vain!” (2 Cor. 6:1). “Your mercy is wonderful, God!” (Ps. 36:8).

Because grace is God’s power, “the apostles testified powerfully about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s grace was abundantly upon them all” (Acts 4:33).





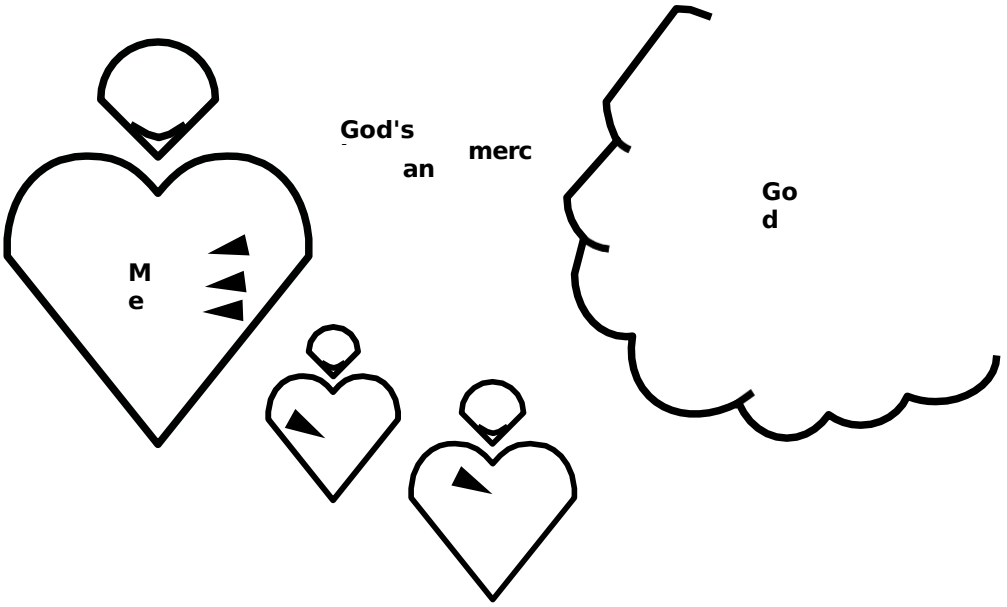
I can control my tongue:

1. When I build the right relationship with Ju-

   I will receive (a new heart)...

2.....Then relationships with others are

   much easier.



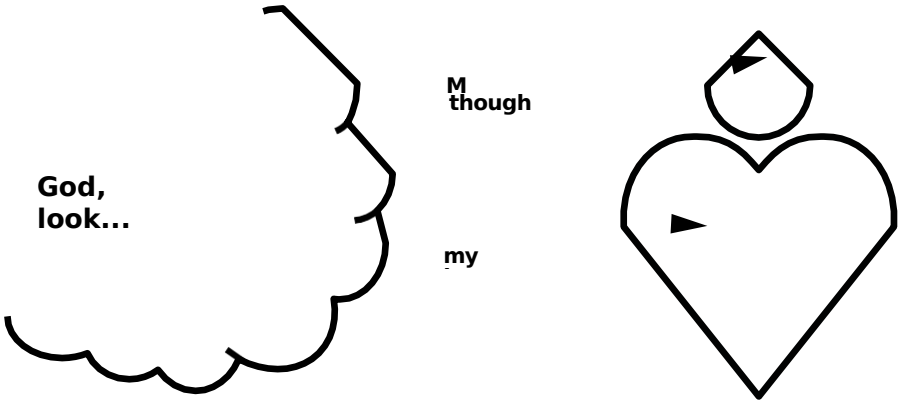
Love and mercy increase when shared with others. (2 Cor. 6:1; Acts 4:33)

How do I nurture my relationship with God? Paul gives us good advice: “Since you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in harmony with him. Root yourselves in him, build your lives on him, and be strengthened in your faith as you were taught. And let your thanksgiving be abundant” (Col. 2:6–7).

Fill your mind with God’s Word!

The shortest but most difficult path is to make the truth in our minds the truth in our hearts, so that we can be doers of the word and not just hearers. “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves” (James 1:22).

> **“I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).**



David asked God: "Search my heart and examine my thoughts" (Psalm 139:23).

When Jesus enters our hearts, he wants to do a thorough cleaning there. We should pray like David: "Search me, God, and see my heart. Test me and see my thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23–24).

David understood that the heart is the core of life. God is always ready to show us what we need to do to get closer to Him, if we ask Him. He also shows us what we need to repent of, what we need to regret, confess, ask God for forgiveness for, or renounce, as well as whom we need to forgive and whom we need to ask for forgiveness from. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He does this if we give him permission.

God wants to help us

— be honest

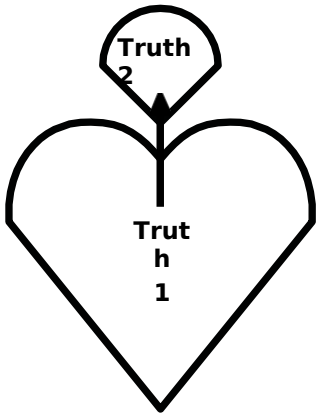
— to do what is right

— strive for sincerity

— to speak the truth: "He who is honest and does what is right, whose heart is sincere and whose words are true" (Ps. 15:2).

“Examine me, O Lord, and test me; try my heart and my mind. I have always kept your mercy in mind; I have lived according to your truth” (Ps. 26:2–3). “But you desire truth in the inner being—teach me your wisdom” (Ps. 51:8). “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:12).

When we have surrendered every part of our hearts to God for purification, the Holy Spirit helps us to use our words in a right and constructive way.



“Then the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds, so that you will remain in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:7–8).

13

The Parable of the Ten virgins

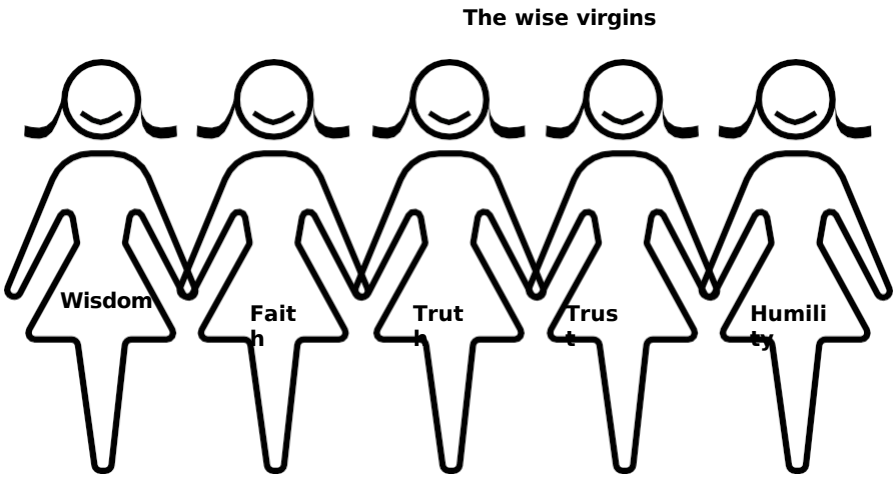
“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. There were ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, on the other hand, took a jar of oil with their lamps. When the bridegroom was delayed, they all began to feel tired and fell asleep. But in the middle of the night there was a cry, 'The bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet him!' Then all the bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise ones, 'Give us some oil, our lamps are going out. But the wise ones replied, 'We cannot, there is not enough for all of us. Go and buy some from the merchants.' But while they were buying oil, the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went with him to the wedding hall, and the door was closed. After a while, the others also arrived and cried out, ‘Lord, Lord, open

to us!' But he replied, 'Truly, I do not know you.' So stay awake, for you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt. 25:1–13).

Jesus told this parable about the time of his return. He described the state of the church before his return. It is divided into two groups: the foolish and the wise. Outwardly, they cannot be distinguished from one another. No one is allowed to draw their own conclusions or divide believers into either group. That is the task of Jesus and the angels at the end of time. “The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all who practice lawlessness. The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. But then the children of God will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. He who has ears, let him hear!" (Matt. 13:41–43).

Why were some wise and others foolish?

The wise virgins



— They were honest. “Lord, you desire honesty” (Jer. 5:3).

— They were able to control their spiritual gifts. “Prophets should control their gifts” (1 Cor. 14:32).

— “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; those who obey his commands are wise” (Ps. 111:10).

— “The discerning man will accept instructions” (Prov. 10:8).

— “The wise fear evil and avoid it” (Proverbs 14:16).

— “The fear of the Lord is a strong defense; it will be a source of life to his children” (Proverbs 14:26).
14:26).

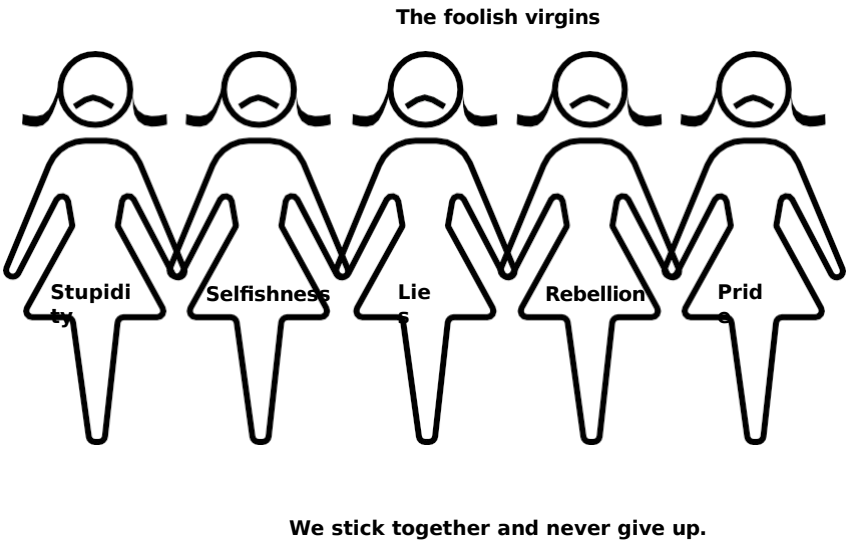
— “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good conduct that his deeds are done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (James 3:13).

— “From the fruit of the tree you will know it; if its fruit is good, so is the tree” (Matthew 7:18).
11:30).

— “Noah was righteous and blameless among his contemporaries, and he walked with God. Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Genesis 6:9, 22). “Go into the ark with your family, for I have found you to be righteous among this generation” (Genesis 7:1).

The wise virgins had both intellectual and heart-level knowledge of God. They had examined themselves, confessed and repented of their sins, and forgiven all who had sinned against them. They had asked forgiveness from those they had hurt (the work of the Holy Spirit in us). They had room in their hearts for the Holy Spirit, and they had personal experience of God's power in their lives.

The foolish virgins



— “You have struck them, but they have not felt the pain; you have destroyed them, but they have not learned their lesson. They have not turned back, but have made themselves harder than rock” (Jer. 5:3).

— “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! (Ezek. 13:3).

— “Then Jesus said to them, ‘You foolish people! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have spoken!’” (Luke 24:25).

— “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?” (Gal. 3:1).

— “A fool seeks his own destruction” (Prov. 10:8).

— “A fool is reckless and arrogant” (Proverbs 14:16).

— “The folly of fools is to deceive themselves” (Proverbs 14:8).

The foolish virgins had intellectual knowledge of God, but they lacked personal experience of God’s power because they were not prepared to face themselves and humble themselves before God. There was no room for the Holy Spirit in them.

“For godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

“Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather” (Matthew 24:28).

One woman was afraid of her own self-destruction. Before she started school, she had been abused by her father. We prayed that God would help her remember the cause of her compulsive self-destruction. She remembered how, at the age of six, she had decided in her anguish to kill herself. As a child, she could not find a way to do it. However, this decision to destroy herself remained buried in the depths of her mind.

Now she was 40 years old and afraid to be alone because she was haunted by compulsive thoughts of self-destruction. First, she chose to forgive her

father.

Her father's behavior had broken her personality. Next, she chose to forgive her mother, who had failed to protect her daughter. Then she asked God for forgiveness for wanting to end the life He had given her as a gift. I prayed that God would free the woman from the spirits of self-destruction that, like ravens, tormented her because of a decision she had made as a child. In His mercy, God gave her the freedom she desired and prayed for.

“But my people did not listen to my voice, and Israel did not obey my will” (Ps. 81:12, NIV).

"Why do you cry out to me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them—I will show you who he is like. He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But whoever hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The flood came and the waters rushed against it, and it immediately collapsed, and the destruction of that house was great” (Luke 6:46–47, NIV).

Matthew tells of two builders:

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall” (Matt. 7:24–27).

A foolish man	The wise man
Built his house on sand (Ps. 81:12, Matt. 13:13–14).	Built his house on rock (Ps. 78:35).
He heard God's words but did not act on them. He preferred to follow traditions (the examples of his parents and others).	He heard God's words and acted on them.
He did not have a personal relationship with God. He did not know God, and God did not know him.	He had a personal relationship with God.
His heart was not purified, and it was filled with something else. He heard the word but did not act on it, deceiving himself (James 1:22).	The truth of the Bible and the Holy Spirit lived in his heart.
In the storms of life, he fell. storms of life	He built on the rock of Christ. In the , he did not fall. “They remembered that God was their rock, and that God Most High was their redeemer” (Ps. 78:35, NKJV).

The foolish virgins	The wise virgins
They had no oil in their vessels (Matt. 25:3).	
Lamp – knowledge of truth at the level of reason.	Lamp – knowledge of truth at the level of reason
Oil container = heart was full of something else. There was no room for the Holy Spirit.	Oil jar = heart. Oil = Holy

Spirit.

"This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Isa. 29:13, NKJV).

"But if we examined ourselves, we would not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31, NKJV). "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8, NKJV).

"As the bridegroom was delayed, they all began to feel tired and fell asleep" (Matt. 25:5).

What does the Bible tell us about the people who fell asleep?

- What happened to Noah while he was asleep? (Genesis 9:20).
- What happened to Samson while he was sleeping? (Judges 16:19).
- A young man named Eutychus fell from a third-story window while he was sleeping and died (Acts 20:9–10). Paul raised him from the dead.

Jesus tells a parable about the kingdom of heaven.

"A man sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was asleep, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and left. When the grain sprouted and began to form ears, the weeds also appeared. The laborers went to their master and said to him, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where did the weeds come from? The master replied, 'An enemy has done this.' The men asked him, 'Do you want us to go and weed it out? ' 'No,' he replied, 'when you weed the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let them grow together until the harvest. At harvest time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned. But gather the wheat into my barn." Matt. 13:24–30.

The explanation of this parable is found in verses 37–43.

— The Son of Man sowed good seed in the field (verse 37).

— The field is the world (verse 38).

— The good seed represents those who accept the word and belong to the kingdom of heaven (verse 38).

— While they slept, the enemy sowed weeds among the wheat and went away (verse 25).

— The weeds are those who believe the devil's lies and are under his control (verse 38).
The enemy himself sows them into all of God's churches.

— The workers wanted to weed out the weeds, but the Son of Man did not allow it, because in gathering the weeds, they might also uproot the wheat (verses 28–29).

— Jesus said that they should be allowed to grow together until the harvest (verse 30).

— The harvest is the end of the world (verse 39).

— The harvesters are angels (verse 39).

— The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all who practice lawlessness (verse 41).

— The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace (verse 42).

— Then the sons of God will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom (verse 43).

I have often wondered how much strife, hardship, false teachings, false spirits, distorted gospel, fanaticism, hypocrisy, jealousy, competition, and various forms of harassment these people under the devil's power cause in God's churches.

— Weeds rob the soil of its nutrients.

— It hinders the growth of good grain.

— It weakens or destroys the grain harvest.

We would like to have many experiences of God as evidence of the

Holy Spirit's control in our lives (Rev. 12:11).

Our experiences can be:

Experiences based on lies or false spirits (John 8:44; Matt. 23:13–15, 18; Matt. 7:15, 21–23; Jer. 5:31).	Experiences based on truth or the Spirit of God (John 8:32; Phil. 2:13; 2 Cor. 3:5; 1 Cor. 15:10).

“Everything that is exposed is brought to light. Therefore it says: ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. See then that you walk carefully, not as unwise but as wise’” (Eph. 5:14–15).

“Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is” (verse 17).

“But in the middle of the night there was a cry, ‘The bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet him!’ Then all the bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out’” (Matt. 25:6–8).

Oil is the Holy Spirit, which is obtained through inner work. It cannot be shared with others. Everyone must have personal, experiential knowledge of God. Many pressures that God's children will face shortly before Jesus' return threaten to extinguish their lamps. The foolish virgins ran out of oil and their lamps went out. They were trapped in darkness.
Their peace and faith faded.

“I have told you these things so that you may have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take heart: I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Both the wise and foolish virgins are in distress. The wise have Jesus' peace in their hearts, but the foolish lack it.

“The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, but he has no roots and only endures for a while, because when trouble or persecution arises because of the word, he immediately falls away” (Matt. 13:20–21).

“For then there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, and never will be” (Mark 13:19). The tribulation will be greater than ever before. The light of the foolish will be extinguished under the tribulation. “I will destroy those who bow down to the host of heaven on the roofs, those who bow down to the Lord but swear by Milcom [Milcom was the chief god of the Ammonites]. Those who have forsaken the Lord, who do not seek the Lord or inquire of him” (Zephaniah 1:5–6).

Ezekiel also tells of the idolatry of the people of Israel (Ezek. 8:14–16). Moses warns us not to follow the ways of unbelievers, lest we fall into their snares (Deut. 12:29–31). We must not imitate them. The devil pressures churches to imitate the ways of unbelievers in order to capture them in his power. He knows how to oppress, deceive, and seduce God's people. He has long experience in this. He confronted Jesus in the wilderness and said, “All these things I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:9).

The devil has many ways of deceiving us into serving him. We become like those who do not care about God in our hobbies, clothing, lifestyle, etc.

> **“Take care, brothers, that none of you may have an evil and unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). “His deceitfulness deceives those who are perishing, because they did not love the truth that would save them. Therefore God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie” (2 Thess. 2:10–11).**

Children who are obedient to God are safe, because the Bible says, “Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25). He lives forever to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25). “But we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know what he has freely given us” (1 Corinthians 2:12).

How, then, can we obtain oil? “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you may be rich; and white garments to clothe you and to cover your shame; and salve to anoint your eyes, so you may see” (Rev. 3:18). The Spirit is available if we sit daily at Jesus’ feet and agree to see our own mistakes and weaknesses. Repenting of them and confessing them to God is necessary for the Holy Spirit to have room in us.

“Dear friends, since we have received such promises, we should cleanse ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, and should make ourselves holy for God. Give us room in your hearts!” (2 Cor. 7:1–2).

“But while they were buying oil, the bridegroom came. Those who were ready went with him to the wedding hall, and the door was shut” (Matt. 25:10).

It will be like in Noah’s time (Genesis 7:16). God closed the door after Noah, and no one could open it. Noah felt the distress of the people outside the ark, but he could not help them. This is what will happen at the end of the world. Only those who are prepared will be allowed in and will be able to be with the bridegroom. We must get to know the life of Jesus and allow God to fill us with His Spirit. “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In this way, the glory of God that shines from the face of Christ is learned and spreads its light. We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us” (2 Cor. 4:6–8). Let us live as Jesus would live in us. Is Jesus visible in your life?

“After a while, others arrived and shouted, ‘Lord, Lord, open us!’ But he replied, ‘Truly, I do not know you.’” (Matt. 25:11–12). Why did Jesus not know them? We get the answer:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, In your name we prophesied and in your name we drove out demons and in your name we performed many miracles.’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matt. 7:21–23).

Isaiah says, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (Isaiah 8:20, NIV).

To better understand this Bible passage, I will tell you about a believer named Leah who was seeking help. She lived with a man who spoke in tongues, cast out evil spirits, and healed the sick. This man said that Lea had evil spirits and that he could heal her stomach problems. Lea prayed for the protection of Jesus' blood during the healing process. The healing did not happen. The man was disappointed and said that the evil spirits in Lea were hindering his healing work.

Lea came to me asking what was true and what was deception. She wanted to know if there were evil spirits inside her. It was difficult to say before I got to know her life story and we prayed together to God for clarity on the matter. Lea agreed to the suggestion, and we prayed for the presence and help of the Holy Spirit. Lea told me that she had been raped as a child. She felt guilty about it, even though she couldn't do anything about the situation. Lea was a wounded person. The devil had planted many lies in her mind, such as "You are worthless. You are bad. No one loves you." We took these lies to the cross and asked God to free her from their grip. The Holy Spirit revealed the truth about her identity to Lea: "Lea is a child of God, good and accepted." She began to be freed from the burdens of her past.

Then I asked about the man who lived with Lea. Lea said that the man lacked self-control and was unable to control his tongue or his appetite for food and drink. He was still married to another woman, and they had two children. If things with his wife did not go his way, he sought comfort in the arms of the other woman. In many areas of life, he did as he pleased, disregarding the advice of the Bible or living according to God's will.

Performing miracles does not prove that the performer is a child of God. "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light [a great healer]. So it is no surprise that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of God. They will receive the end that their deeds deserve" (2 Cor. 11:14–15). Doing the will of the Heavenly Father is the key to the kingdom of heaven. "Here is the patience of

the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12, NKJV).

The Holy Spirit opened Lea's eyes to see the truth of things. She took courage and sent this man away from her.

What should we do to know that God knows us?

"The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him" (Nahum 1:7). "I tell you, he will see that justice is done, and quickly. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). "And so God is my savior. I trust in him, I am not afraid, for the Lord is my strength and my power, he saved me" (Isaiah 12:2).

We have a great need to pray and learn to trust God's guidance. "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13). "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). "I am coming soon, and I will bring with me the reward I will give to each person according to what they have done" (Rev. 22:12). "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2).

I hope that through this metaphor we will learn to know ourselves and our own difficulties. Now is still the time to prepare for the kingdom of heaven. May God help us in this preparatory work.

Dear God. Today I ask for your help in my life. Give me the strength to overcome every temptation instead of defeat. I ask for success and blessings instead of failure. Teach me to be content with my lot in this world, on the road of disappointment. Teach me to give my pain and sorrow to you and through them to understand others who suffer. Merciful Father, I give you my fears, take them away and fill me with your love. I suffer from unbelief and restlessness. I ask you to take them away and nail them to the cross at Golgotha, because you died so that I might live. Give me more faith and hope for a new life. Instead of bitterness, give me your compassion and divine understanding. I give you my resentment and ask for the strength to forgive, so that I too may be forgiven. Help me to control my desires. Renew my mind and thoughts according to your will. Instead of selfishness, give me love for others and the strength to deny myself and my unnecessary needs. Instead of all the insults and wounds and negative things, dear God, let me experience your healing power and goodness. My hope is entirely in you, my Savior, my Redeemer, my God. I thank you for hearing me and for answering my prayers in the name and blood of Jesus. Amen.

14

Complete surrender

Surrender to God is a personal, internal struggle for every human being.

Every human being begins life as a member of a rebellious race. Each person has his or her own internal struggle against the almighty King of Heaven. For many of us, this struggle means a lifelong resistance to God, about which an entire book could be written. It could be titled: "*Ways to avoid surrendering to God.*" Many of us express this opposition through our lifestyle. Some allow themselves to fall prey to temptations that come their way. They give power to their desires and lusts and may find themselves addicted to alcohol, tobacco, sex, medication, or drugs, for example. Others, on the other hand, act impeccably on the outside and take good care of their affairs, while harboring many kinds of idols in their hearts. We all have an inherent need to control our own lives, and therefore we are reluctant to give it over to Jesus. We have learned in various ways to reject, flee, and hide from God's call. We live according to familiar patterns. We experience a complete breakdown in our values when we agree to surrender to God. As a result of our surrender, God wants to reprogram our minds. The core of this reprogramming is that we grow dependent on God and pray for His help in different areas of our lives. Holy The Spirit is present to help us in this process.

> **“Jesus answered and said to him [Nicodemus], ‘Truly, truly, unless one is born again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3).**

The First Letter of Peter (1:3) and the Letter to the Ephesians (1:17–19) say the same thing.

> **“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9–10, NIV).**

When you believe in Jesus’ atoning work for your sins and give Him control of your life, you become a member of God’s kingdom.

Daily Surrender to God

Do you understand what it means to surrender to God in your daily life? You may consider yourself a Christian, but have you been born again into God’s family? Being born again is the beginning of building and deepening your relationship with God, and the Holy Spirit wants to guide us in this step by step.

In a life surrendered to God, we learn daily, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to say “no” to selfishness and “yes” to God’s will and guidance. The closer we are to God, the more confident we can become. Many Christians live disappointed lives because they have not chosen to surrender completely to God. They try to control their own lives. God’s plan cannot then be realized in their daily lives.

> **Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, NIV).**

Are you currently living a selfish life? You may be obedient to God's will in some areas of your life, but you keep other areas under your own control.

Barriers to surrendering to God

Even genuine Christians may close off certain areas of their lives from God. Often, growing as a Christian is slow and painful because we do not know ourselves. We cannot give to God the things that we do not recognize or accept in ourselves. Have you surrendered your possessions, your marriage, your children, your time, etc. to God's control? Is this way of thinking foreign to you?

The Holy Spirit will gladly open your eyes to see the areas of your life that you have not given to God. Does it feel scary to give God more power in your life? In His love, He will turn everything we give Him into a great blessing for us.

> **“Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand and say to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you’” (Isaiah 41:10, 13, NIV).**

“I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing” (Ps. 34:5, 8, 10, NIV).

“Then you will delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act” (Ps. 37:4– 5, NIV).

“For the Lord is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you” (Ps. 84:12–13, ESV).

Surrender is a process during which we may defend our habits, customs, values, and patterns that are contrary to God’s will. For example, how we use our time, what we watch or listen to. We may explain to ourselves that it has no effect on our spiritual life. You may admit that you do not always control your eating, your emotional outbursts, or your tongue. After all, none of us is perfect! We easily deceive ourselves. The only way is to surrender all our weaknesses to God. In this way, we resist the work of the enemy in our lives and gain victory. When we accept our mistakes and shortcomings, their influence continues to work in us. Have you thought about this in your own life?

Obedience to God is a conscious choice that is always followed by blessings. Living contrary to God's will means open rebellion, which results in blessings being withheld.

— Excuses and self-deception. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles? ’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. depart from me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matt. 7:21–23, NKJV).

— If you are a rebellious child of God, you may experience God's loving discipline until you learn to repent of your sins and make amends. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6, KJV). Pain can be a very good teacher. “For I am cast down, and my pain is ever before me. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (Ps. 38:18–19, NKJV). Saving faith is always followed by repentance and repentance. “[John the Baptist] said, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matthew 3:2, NKJV). “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:19, NIV).

“May grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. We have come to know him who has called us by his glory and power. He has given us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires, and become partakers of the divine nature. Therefore, strive to show steadfastness in your faith, true knowledge in your steadfastness, self-control in your knowledge, endurance in your self- control, godliness in your endurance, mutual affection in your godliness, and love in your mutual affection. When you see that you have all these qualities and they are increasing, you will not remain inactive, and your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ will not be fruitless. (2 Peter 1:2–8).

This means that we are willing to choose and strive to let go of our rebellious spirit and find God's will. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination” (1 Sam. 15:22–23, NKJV). Resisting God costs us much more than surrendering to Him and asking for His help. If we consciously continue to live contrary to God’s will, we will have to answer for the consequences of our sins ourselves.

Where does deliberate sin lead us?

— It separates us from God.

— It becomes more costly than we are willing to pay.

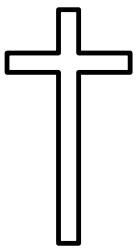
— It holds us captive longer than we could have imagined. “For countless troubles surround me; my sins have overtaken me, so that I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head, and my courage has failed me” (Ps. 40:13, NIV).

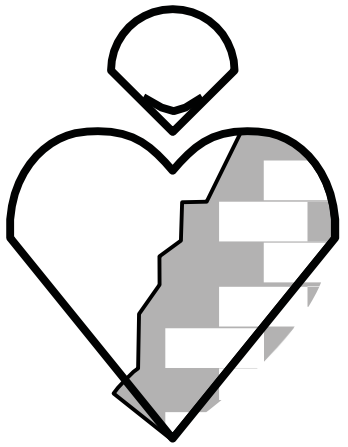
— It deceives us into loving evil more than good, lies more than truth. "You love evil and not good; you speak lies and not truth" (Ps. 52:5, NKJV).

— No need to fear or respect God. "Sin whispers in the heart of the wrongdoer, so that he no longer fears God" (Ps. 36:2).

— It blinds them to their own faults. "Sin blinds his eyes, so that he cannot see his faults" (Ps. 36:3).

“His words are evil and deceitful; he rejects wisdom and does wrong” (Ps. 36:4). Every act of resistance to God’s will is an obstacle to the abundant life that God has promised us even in this age. “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV). Sins build a wall between us and God. In His great mercy and love, God offers us complete forgiveness if we humble ourselves, lay down our weapons, and trust in His guidance.





Our hard hearts begin to soften as we look to Jesus.

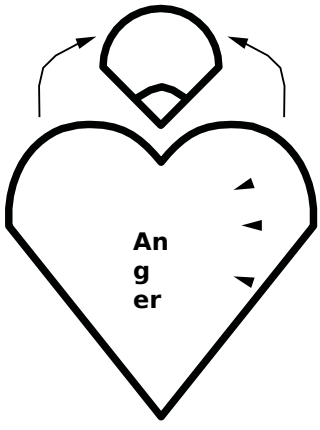
God’s love softens and renews our hearts.

I hope that your heart will soften as you look at Jesus on the cross. He did everything for us by paying for our sins and wrongdoings with His own blood. As our Creator and Sustainer, He humbled Himself to the point of death because He loves us with eternal love. Jesus has abundant blessings in store for us when we make room for him in our lives. The Almighty has compassion on our weaknesses. He knows that we are unable to cope with the unexpected difficulties that lie ahead.

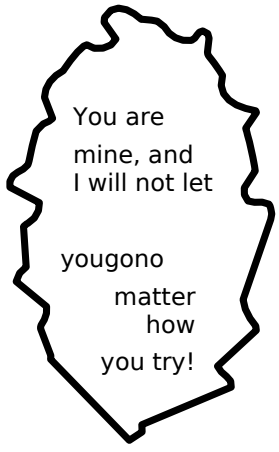
"Lord, our God, other lords have ruled over us, but you alone we praise, your name alone" (Isaiah 26:13, NIV).

"They promise them liberty, being themselves the servants of corruption: for whosoever is overcome of sin is a slave thereof" (2 Peter 2:19).

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin'" (John 8:34, NKJV). "You know that if you submit yourselves to anyone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey. You are either slaves of sin, which leads to judgment of death, or slaves of obedience, which leads to justification of life" (Rom. 6:16).



I have chosen slavery for myself



Spirit of hatred

Spirit of hatred: "I control you and I will not let you go."

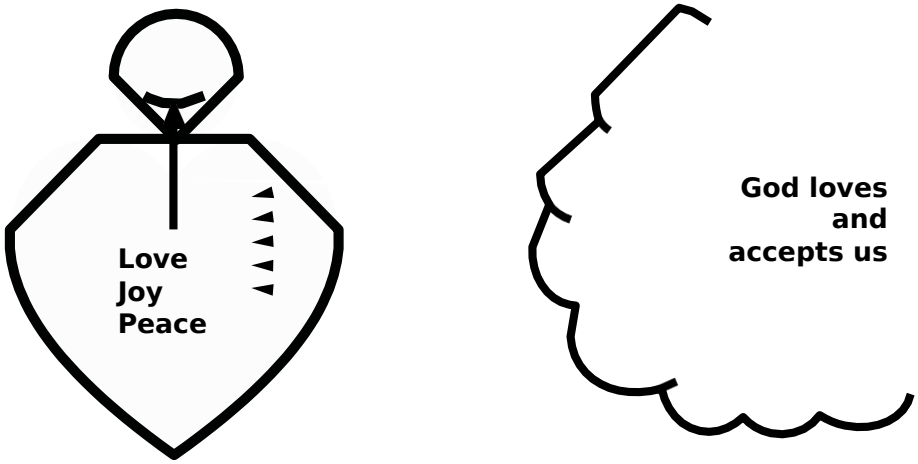
True inner peace comes only through surrendering to God!

> **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27, NIV).**
>
> **“I have told you these things so that you may have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV).**

It is God’s will that we reflect His love to those around us through our lives.

> **“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, ESV).**

Positive thoughts



I live an abundant life. I reflect God's love.

What would you like to reflect around you? Does your presence draw people closer to God or distance them from Him?

“And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3, NIV).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NKJV).

Jesus did not go to the cross just to guarantee us eternal life. His purpose is to live with us here and now. He wants our lives to be ruled not by lusts or negative emotions, but by God’s love.

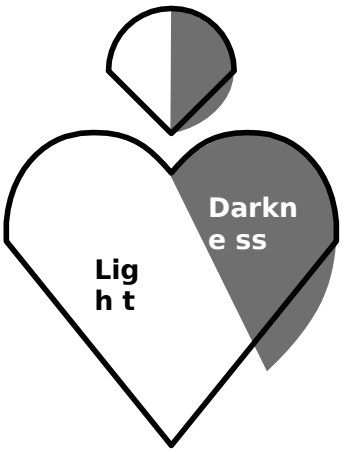
“If you have bitter anger and strife in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes from above, but it is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where there is jealousy and strife, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:14–18, NIV).

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8, NKJV). Jesus went to heaven to prepare a place for us. “Therefore, my beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (2 Peter 3:14, NKJV). When God’s word dwells in us, it sanctifies us. “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. And for their sake I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified” (John 17:17, 19, NIV).

How can we get rid of things that are contrary to God's will?

> **"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:7–8, NKJV).**

God wants us to yield to him and give him full authority to purify and heal our hearts so that we can be his witnesses throughout our lives.



A double-minded heart

Light and darkness both speak to us and want to take up more space within us.

"If your whole body is full of light, with no part of it dark, it will be completely light, as when a lamp shines on you with its bright light" (Luke 11:36, NIV). "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—for all goodness and righteousness and truth are the fruit of light" (Eph. 5:8–9, VK).

> *Aino came to ask for help because of her kleptomaniac tendencies. The police had caught her several times, and she had paid fines for her shoplifting. When shopping, Aino felt a compelling urge to steal something, even if it was just candy, underwear, etc. She was a professing Christian and had prayed about it, but to no avail. While shopping, the temptation took hold of her.*

She had not consciously learned to resist her urge to steal, but gave in to it. In this way, she repeatedly disappointed herself. We prayed together about this, and I taught Aino how to resist the devil as soon as the thought of stealing came to her mind, and how to immediately ask God for help. On her next shopping trip, Aino prayed for the protection of Jesus' blood at the store's front door and decided to resist temptation. After finishing her shopping, she returned home and had forgotten all about shoplifting! The temptation did not arise! When I called her, she told me that from now on, praying before going shopping would be her key to overcoming this problem.

* * *

Satu couldn't control her gambling addiction and came to me. She was also a Christian and understood that the devil must be resisted. She tried everything she could to resist her gambling addiction, but to no avail. The temptation to gamble took over. All her money had been lost to gambling. I asked her if she had ever given this problem to God to deal with. It had not occurred to her. We prayed to God for help and gave our gambling addiction completely into His care. I asked God to show me if this addiction had any roots in Satu's heart. Satu burst into tears and told me that her father had abandoned her when she was a child. She had never dealt with this little girl's pain and had not chosen to forgive her father. When she had told me the whole story and expressed her feelings about it, I asked her, "Will you choose to forgive your father?" After thinking it over, she chose to forgive her father. I prayed that God would heal and cleanse her heart of all wrongdoing. I also asked God to bind Satu's spirit to the Spirit of God, her mind to the mind of God, and her will to the will of God. "So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it

will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9–10, NIV). In His mercy, God freed Sadu from his gambling addiction, and the quality of his life improved.

Breaking free from negativity:

1. **Admit your own difficulties.** Learn to control your mind with God's help.

2. **Memorize God's promises.** "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:13, 19, NKJV).

3. **Give your heart to Jesus**. This means surrendering all areas of your life to God's control. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

4. **Learn to be thankful.** "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28, NKJV). "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NKJV). This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18, NIV).

5. **Learn to forgive with all your heart.** Choose to forgive those who have hurt you. Surrender your negative feelings to God. God wants to free you from them (1 John 1:9).

6. Pr**ay to God for mercy and strength.** "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15–16, NKJV). "For David says of him, 'I see the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken'" (Acts 2:25, NIV).

When facing difficulties in life, I can choose my attitude:

- I can get angry, irritable, bad-tempered, nervous, restless.
- I ask God for help, trust in His guidance, remain calm, do not let evil overcome me, but overcome evil with good.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (1 Peter 5:6, NIV). Learn to ask God for what you need and wait for His answer in His time and in His way.

He has a plan for every person. Trust calmly and without worry in God’s guidance in your life. “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7, NIV).

I know from my own experience how difficult it can sometimes be to wait for God's timing. My family and I have moved several times within Australia. Our houses have always sold faster than expected, for which we are grateful. The last time we sold our house, it took three years. We didn't understand God's timing, but we trusted His guidance. We looked for a new home and found one we liked, but because our old house hadn't sold, we couldn't buy it. We also found a beautiful plot of land on a hill. We often went to admire the place and hoped that no one would buy the plot. One day we noticed a "Sold" sign on the plot. We were disappointed, but we still believed that God had a better plan for us. We waited another year, and then suddenly our house was sold. We immediately drove 110 kilometers to the plot we had admired, and a surprise awaited us. A beautiful house had been built there and was for sale. We immediately called the builder and asked to see the house. The house met all our wishes. We made the deal, and five weeks later we moved into our new home. God knew that we should wait for the house to be built on the beautiful plot. I felt grateful that God knew the best timing. It is therefore worth trusting God in everything.

“Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe prosperity. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this” (Psalm 37:3– 5, NIV).

Trust boldly in God and you will experience his guidance in your own life.

15

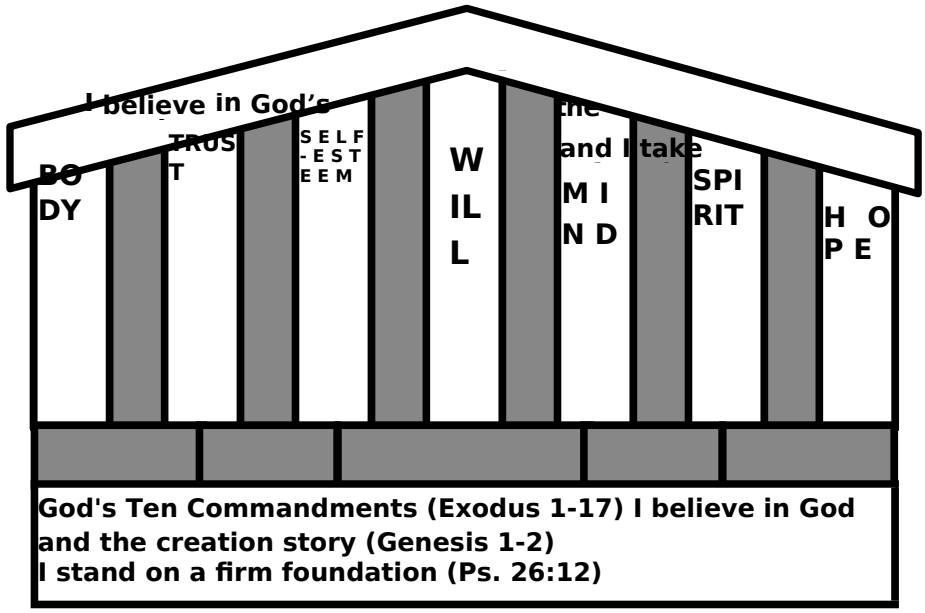
The cornerstones of life

“When all foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3)

Healthy foundations

The pillar of cloud went before the people of Israel, guiding, protecting, and illuminating their journey (Exodus 13:21–22; Psalm 78:14). Instead of a pillar of cloud, God has given us His promises in the Bible, which guide, protect, and illuminate our lives. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). “When your word is revealed, it gives light; even the simple gain understanding” (verse 130). “Your word is sure and true, and your servant loves it” (verse 140). “He will spread his wings over you, and you will be safe under his wings. His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart” (Ps. 91:4). “He commands his angels to guard you wherever you go” (verse 11). “He says to me, ‘You are my father, my God, my fortress’” (Ps. 89:27). “The Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. Blessed are those who trust in you, O Lord God Almighty” (Ps. 84:12–13).

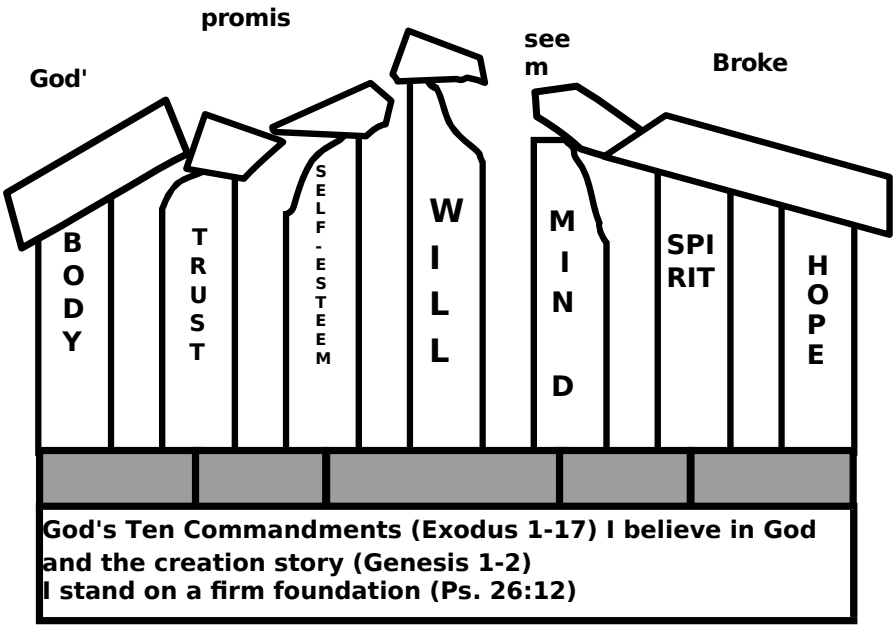
“Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock” (Matt. 7:24–25).



The house is built on rock.

Broken foundations

“When all foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3).

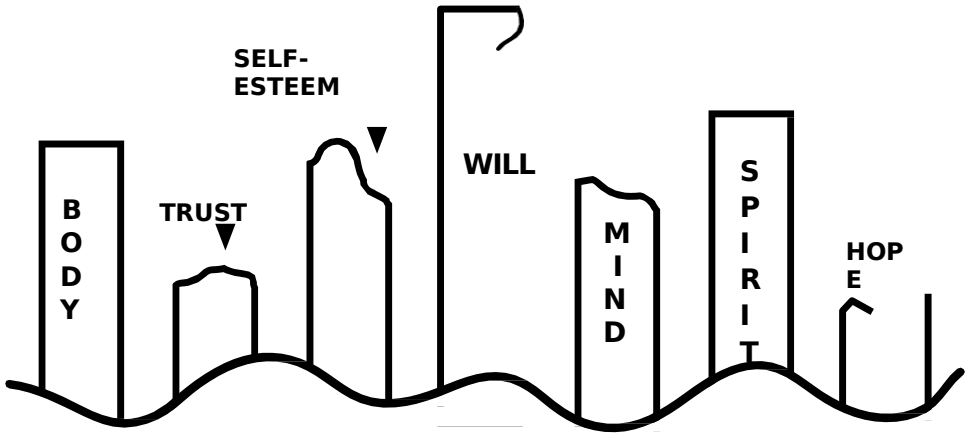


If even one of these pillars is broken, it has clear consequences for the whole life of that person!

If a child's will and trust have been broken, it is difficult for them to believe in God's promises for themselves. Their self-esteem and mind suffer even as adults. External prayer support is needed when painful life situations return to consciousness. When asked, God rebuilds broken will and trust. “But in their distress they cried out to the Lord, and he delivered them from their troubles” (Ps. 107:28). “He delivered them from the darkness of death, he broke their chains” (verse 14). “He sent his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave” (verse 20). “Hear the cry of the prisoners; with your mighty arm deliver those who are condemned to die” (Ps. 79:11). “God of hosts, restore us; let us see the light of your face, and we shall be saved” (Ps. 80:8).

A person who does not accept God

A person who does not accept God cannot see, hear, or understand God’s promises. Therefore, security, protection, and light are missing from their life.



The foundation of life is missing because the person does not believe in God as Creator, but believes in the theory of evolution.

What does this mean?

— The body functions normally.

— Confidence is based on one's own strength.

— Self-esteem is based on external factors, such as intelligence, status, money, etc. One can hide behind these. Identity may be lost.

— Willpower can be overdeveloped or underdeveloped. Some people tend to control those around them, while others are followers.

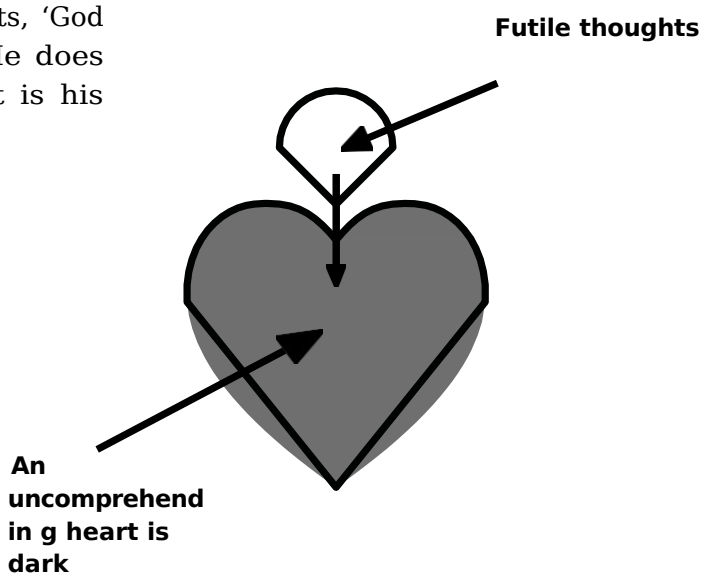
— The mind is uncommitted, living in its own worlds.

— The spirit slumbers.

— Hope is bound by circumstances.

The Epistle to the Romans clarifies the matter: "Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Because they did not value the knowledge of God, God gave them over to worthless thoughts, to do what is not right. They are filled with all kinds of injustice, wickedness, greed, and malice, filled with envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice; they slander and revile, they hate God, they are insolent and arrogant, boastful and conceited, disobedient to their parents, foolish and unreliable, unloving and unmerciful" (Rom. 1:21, 28–31).

"The wicked man boasts, 'God will not punish me. He does not even exist!' That is his thinking" (Ps. 10:4).



The human spirit suffers if it does not receive daily nourishment and connection with the Spirit of its Creator. Hope for a better life is lacking.

Will

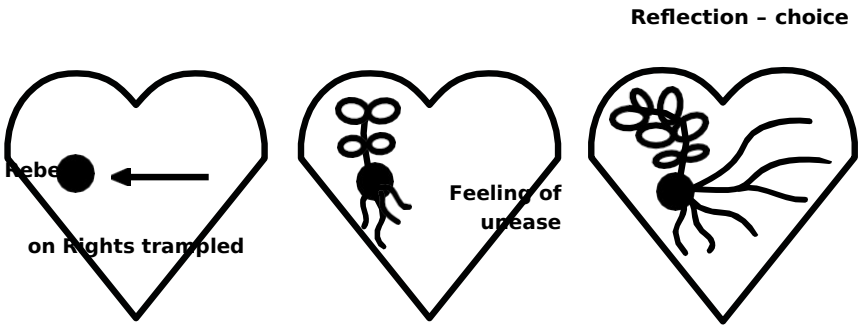
Faith is also a matter of will. Will is the dominant force in human nature. All other abilities of the soul are subject to the control of the will. It is the force within us that makes choices and decisions. Our will determines whether we are obedient or disobedient to God's will. We must learn to understand the true power of the will. However, we

are not always able to control it ourselves.

We must surrender our will to God. When we give it to Him, Jumala begins to work in us. Then we want to seek God's will in our lives.

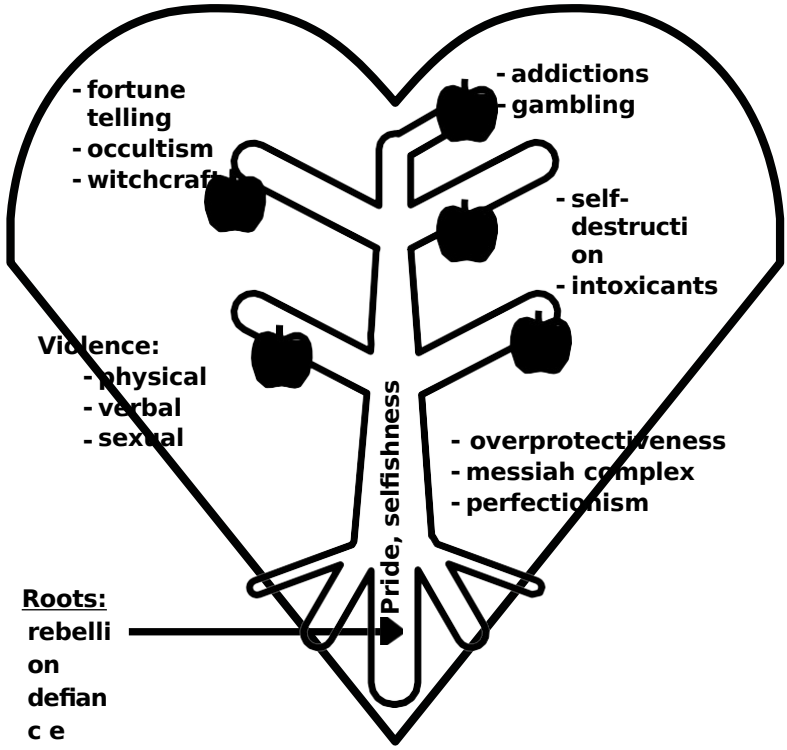
I have treated people whose will was broken as children. They have been unable to make sensible choices in their lives and have not known the meaning of their lives. Our will can be broken as children, for example, by unreasonable demands, by having to take on too much responsibility for younger siblings, or by excessive discipline. Strict discipline leads to outwardly good behavior, but rebellion or defiance grows in the heart. The child thinks, "*Just wait until I grow up.*" In some cases, the child's ability to make choices disappears completely or does not develop in line with their age. They learn to do what others tell them to do. We must not weaken a child's ability to make choices and decisions, because they need all their willpower in life. Treat your child's will wisely and sensitively, as if it were a precious treasure. Do not break it, but guide them with good example and wisdom. You can gain understanding by asking God for it (James 1:5). If the will is broken, God wants to heal it. "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). We are all at a crossroads, choosing whom we want to serve.

I often meet young people who are rebellious. The Book of Samuel says: "Rebellion is a sin comparable to witchcraft" (1 Sam. 15:23). The parents did not understand that forcing and controlling their child would only increase his spirit of rebellion and defiance.



The consequences of rebellion.

Often parents do not understand the consequences of their behavior. God has a plan for our children, but so does the devil. Whose plan will you help your children fulfill?



Family burden.

I have three children myself, and like all children, they tested boundaries and wanted to have their own way. I didn't want to break their will, and when the situation became difficult, I took them to their room and we knelt down to pray to God for help. I prayed that He would free my child from everything that was not of God. I asked God to give my child a humble and obedient heart and to give me heavenly wisdom, patience, and strength to be a good and understanding mother. When we got up from our knees, I left my child alone in the room for a moment. When she came out of the room, I felt that the Holy Spirit had won my child's heart and changed her attitude. Sometimes even now I remember these situations with my children. My younger daughter told me that she hated praying in her room because she wanted to be mean. When we prayed

together, she couldn't do it anymore. Thank God that He hears my prayers and gives me wisdom in raising my children.

— How are you doing as a parent?

— What about your will? Is it intact, or do you need prayer support to restore it?

If your will is broken, you can choose to forgive the person who hurt you. Forgiveness is the beginning of inner healing.

Why is forgiveness so important? The offender has no way to pay for the damage he has caused. “The man had nothing to pay” (Matt. 18:25). The offended person cannot be free until he forgives the debt. Forgiveness benefits the forgiver most. “The king took pity on his servant, released him, and forgave his debt” (Matthew 18:27). “But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:15). This text illustrates a biblical principle. By holding on to anger and disappointment, we imprison ourselves.

What happens to a debt when it is forgiven?

— The debt remains unpaid.
— The creditor's attitude changes.

Jesus is willing to pay everyone's debts. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

— Ask God to restore your willpower.

— If there is a spirit of rebellion, defiance, or vengeance in your heart, confess it to God and command it to leave you in the name and power of Jesus (1 John 1:9).

— Ask God for a new heart in which the Holy Spirit can dwell.

— Committing ourselves to God is our daily task.

— Detach yourself from everything that burdens your life. Through repentance, repentance, forgiveness, and the power of Jesus' blood, we can be freed from the devil's traps. “And they will escape the devil’s trap, in which he has held them captive to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:26). “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth

will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

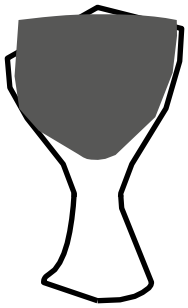
Mind

It is good to understand how the mind works. "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7, NKJV). Behavior reflects the movements of the mind. "For those who live according to the flesh have the mind of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have the mind of the Spirit" (Romans 8:5, NKJV). If we have a negative mindset, we will have a negative life. But if we are ready for a change of heart, things can change. God's Word exhorts us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2, NKJV). If we choose to follow this exhortation, we will experience the truth of God's promises and the blessings that come with them.

Lie – darkness	→	"For you were once darkness" (Eph. 5:8). Believing lies leads to darkness of mind.
Truth – light	→	"You, Lord, light my lamp; you, God, bring light to my darkness" (Ps. 18:29).

In the renewal of the mind, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are given permission to gradually change our false thoughts into true ones. This is reflected outwardly.

> **"Be gentle and remove all filth and evil. Accept the word that has been planted in you and can save your souls" (James 1:21).**



Full of lies, filth, and wickedness. “Give us room in your hearts!” (2 Corinthians 7:2).

The cup must first be emptied before it can be refilled with the Holy Spirit!

The work of the Holy Spirit is subtle. “But everything will be exposed when it is illuminated by the light” (Ephesians 5:13). As our minds are renewed, our inner peace increases.

We behave according to our beliefs:

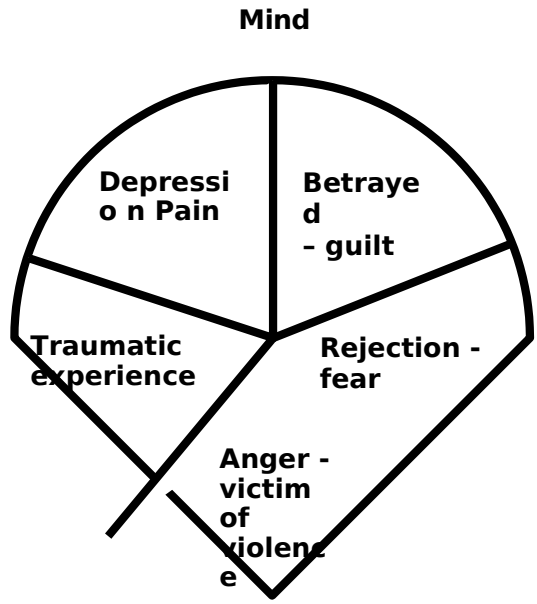
— When I believe that I am worthless, I cannot set boundaries for myself. This can even lead to abuse.

— When I believe that I am a child of God—good and accepted—I respect myself and have clear boundaries.

Renewal of the mind

God wants every part of your life.

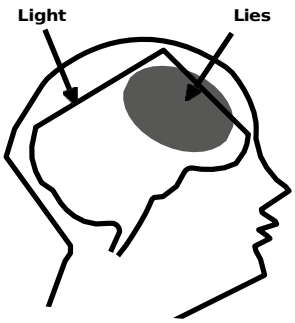
“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

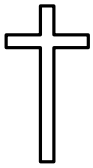


It is worth examining your own beliefs and their truthfulness. It makes life easier. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, we cannot be freed from our distorted beliefs. “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:23–24).

A deep renewal of the mind requires us to face our painful memories, if God deems it necessary. At this stage, we often need the prayer support of a trusted person. “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). “But he hears the prayer of the righteous” (Proverbs 15:29).

How do lies hinder a Christian’s life and conduct?





“Take care, then, that the light in you is not darkness. If your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, your whole body will be full of light, as when a lamp gives you light with its rays” (Luke 11:35–36).

Lies build barriers, separating us from our true identity in Christ (Eph. 1:13–14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5; Luke 11:35–26). “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

We are always under God’s gaze. He sees and knows everything. The Bible exhorts us to keep our thoughts under control. We should not allow our minds to wander recklessly. We must bring every thought into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). God wants the truth to live in us. “But you desire truth in the inner being” (Ps. 51:8). Our daily prayer should be: *“Teach me your way, that I may walk in your truth.”* The Bible teaches us how to direct our thoughts: “Think about

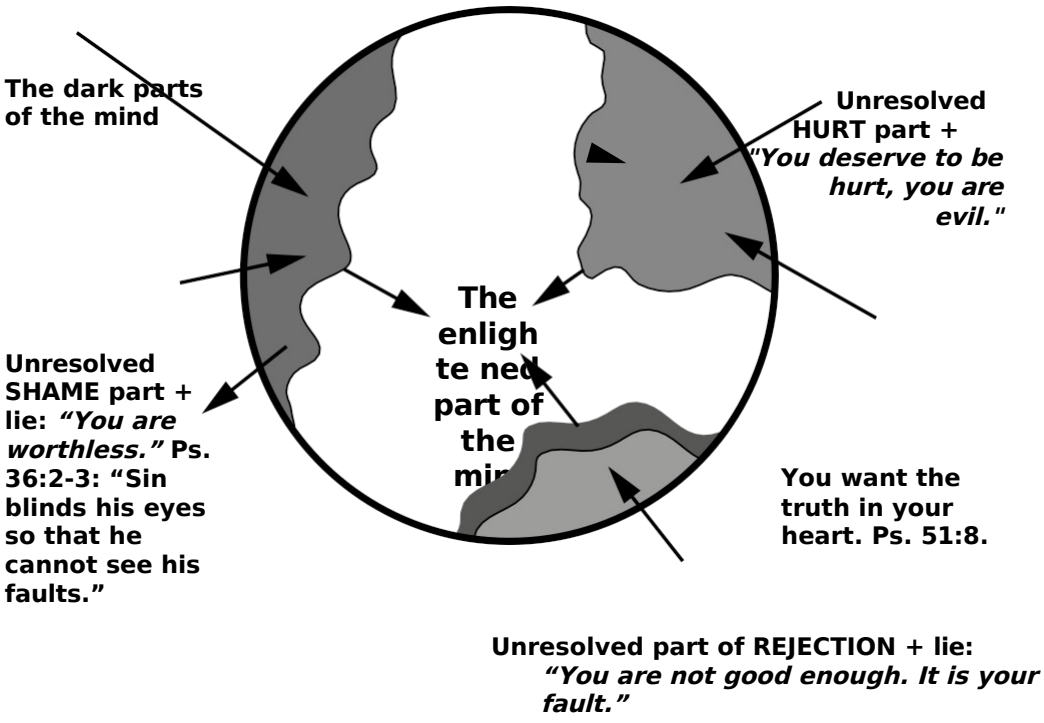
whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise" (Phil. 4:8).

Our minds are weighed down by

- unending sorrow
- pain and illness
- sins and guilt
- verbal abuse
- unforgivable insults
- disappointments
- experiences of rejection as a child or adult
- losses
- traumatic experiences
- loneliness.

A mind that is partly in darkness

“If your whole body is full of light, and no part of you is dark, then your whole body will be full of light, as when a lamp shines its light on you” (Luke 11:36).


The dark parts of the mind
Unresolved HURT part + *“You deserve to be hurt, you are evil."*
The enlighte ned part of the mi
Unresolved SHAME part + lie: *“You are worthless.”* Ps. 36:2-3: “Sin blinds his eyes so that he cannot see his faults.”
You want the truth in your heart. Ps. 51:8.
Unresolved part of REJECTION + lie: *“You are not good enough. It is your fault.”*

The devil plants a lie in every insult. For example, if you experienced rejection as a child, the devil's message is the lie/interpretation: *"You were rejected because you are not good enough, and it's your own fault!"* This feeling of guilt is heavy to bear. If you were bullied at school, the lie might be: *"You are bad and you deserved to be bullied."* If you believe that, you will behave accordingly. If someone has hurt you, the devil whispers in your ear: *"Don't forgive them, they don't deserve it."* When we believe lies, the doors of our minds open to the devil and our growth as Christians is hindered. Lies like these sink deep into our subconscious and can be forgotten. Through lies, darkness dwells in some parts of our minds. They have a negative impact on our daily lives. The purpose of lies is to weaken our faith and trust in God and rob us of the freedom promised by Christ. “For he (the devil) is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). When we believe the lies of the enemy of our souls, they grow into self-sustaining, self-sufficient parts of our minds. Paul says:

> **“I don’t even understand what I’m doing: I don’t do what I want, but what I hate. And if I do what I don't want to do, then I admit that the law is good. So I no longer do what I do, but sin lives in me" (Rom. 7:15-17; the lie that lives independently in me).**

The Bible sheds light on this matter. “Whoever is overcome by something is its slave” (2 Peter 2:19). When I believe a lie, I act according to my belief. So I am imprisoned—I do what the lie drives me to do. The Epistle to the Ephesians gives us more guidance: “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:11).

How do we bring these lies to light?

— Pray that God's light will reveal to you all the lies you believe. "But everything will be exposed when it is illuminated by the light" (Eph. 5:13).

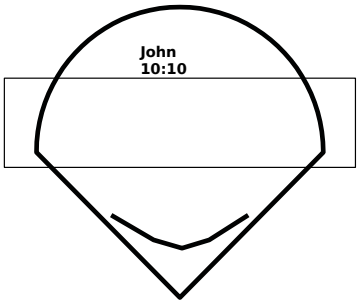
— Confess and ask God for forgiveness for everything that the Holy Spirit reveals to you, and break free from it. Pray also as David did: “But who can discern their own errors? Cleanse me from my hidden faults” (Ps. 19:13).

— Fill your mind with God’s truth. “But whoever lives by the truth comes

into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done in the sight of God" (John 3:21).

Falsehood	**Truth**
"I am not good enough."	*"God loves me; my worth is measured by the cross"* (John 3:16).
"I am evil."	*"I am a child of God and accepted"* (John 1:12).
"Don't forgive."	*"If I don't forgive, God won't forgive me either." forgive me my sins, and I will be subjected to severe punishment"* (Matt. 18:34–35; Matt. 5:25).

The filter God has given us:



"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

We can put every thought that comes into our minds through this filter. God wants us to have life in abundance.

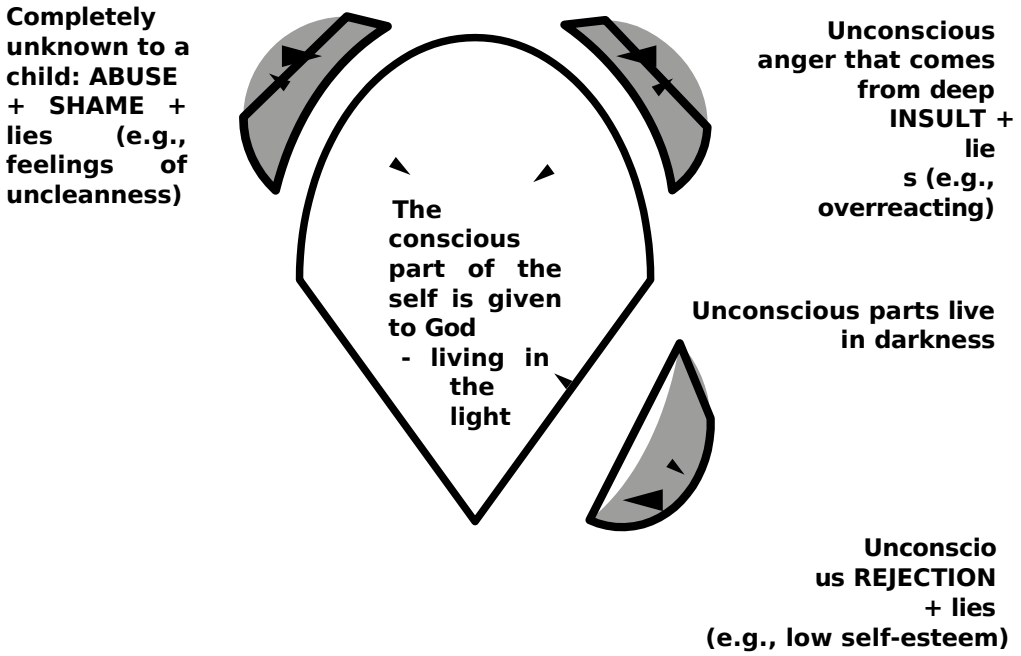
Every time you encounter difficulties, pressures, or various sufferings, use the passage from the Gospel of John (10:10) as a sieve to see which one is behind your difficulties, God or the enemy of your soul (the thief).

> **"Who can bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies! Who can condemn us to destruction? Christ—but he died for us, and more than that: he was raised from the dead, he sits at the right hand of God, and he intercedes for us!" (Rom. 8:33–34).**

What a loving Heavenly Father we have! He always wants what is best for us.

A broken spirit

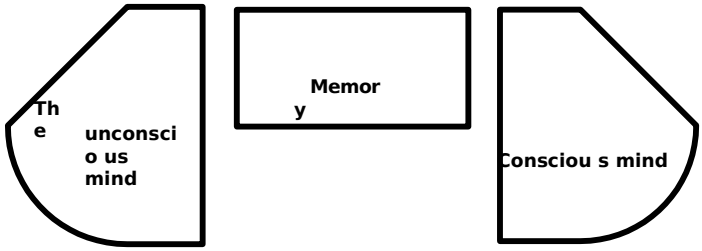
“Lord, our God, other lords have ruled over us, but you alone we praise, your name alone” (Isaiah 26:13, NIV).

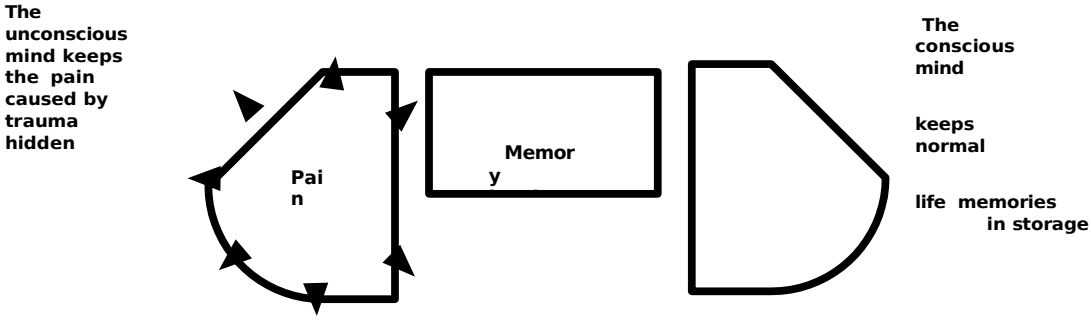

Completely unknown to a child: ABUSE + SHAME + lies (e.g., feelings of uncleanness)
Unconscious anger that comes from deep INSULT + lie s (e.g., overreacting)
The conscious part of the self is given to God - living in the light
Unconscious parts live in darkness
Unconscio us REJECTION + lies (e.g., low self-esteem)

Unconscious parts of the mind may take control of us.

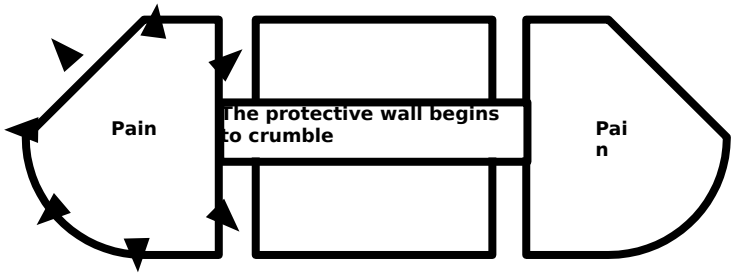
Detached parts of the mind are independent and self-sustaining. They have their own will and feelings, such as fear, anger, stubbornness, selfishness, jealousy, etc. Difficult traumas, accidents, and losses experienced as a child can break a child's mind and cast a shadow over their future life.

Traumatic experience





The protective wall of memory keeps the pain away from the person's consciousness.



In a traumatic experience, the mind splits.

Messages about the traumatic experience return to consciousness through dreams, vague feelings of unease, negative thoughts, fragments of memory, etc.

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and hidden things that you do not know" (Jer. 33:3, NIV).

“And the hidden things shall be brought to light” (Job 28:11, KJV).

With prayer and God’s power, we can overcome even the most difficult situations in life.

“The word of God is living and powerful. It is sharper than any double- edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow; it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:12–13). Everything that has been created is open and exposed to him, to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:12–13).

The mind hides painful experiences from the child's consciousness. This is a protective mechanism provided by God, because the child cannot live with the memory and understand it if the trauma is in his or her consciousness. The child cannot control the part of the mind that is tied to the trauma. They subconsciously affect the child's behavior and dreams. Even though the conscious part has been given to God, these unconscious parts often do not know God and in many cases resist receiving God. Healing requires opening the traumatized parts of the mind to God's healing power. This process requires knowledge, wisdom, experience, prayer, and God's help. He wants to express himself as a loving God and is able to unite and heal the separated parts of the mind. “And I will love him and reveal myself to him” (John 14:21). Such a person often needs the help of a professional.

God promises to help us when we trust in him. “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted a broken spirit; he will save those whose spirits are crushed” (Ps. 34:19). What a wonderful promise! God wants to repair what the devil has broken.

“A broken spirit is my sacrifice; a broken heart you will not despise, O God” (Ps. 51:19).

“Let me hear joy and gladness; revive the spirit which thou hast broken” (verse 10).

“I will heal their wounds and cure their injuries, says the Lord. I will heal you, Zion, you who are called ‘the forsaken wife,’ you whom no one cares for” (Jer. 30:17).

“But I will restore their fortunes and heal their wounds; I will restore them and give them lasting peace and prosperity” (Jer. 33:6).

A wounded heart

“An offended brother is like a fortified city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle” (Prov. 18:19).

Here are some examples of ways to hurt others. If you feel it is necessary, discuss these issues with your family. Listen to what they have to say.

— Are there conflicts, disputes, or arguments in your family?

— Do you regularly insult your children or spouse?

— Do you lecture them, scold them, or give them a hard time?

— Do you use harsh words toward them?

— Do you underestimate their opinions?

— Do you punish them with your anger?

— Do you have time to listen to them and answer their questions?

— Do you say "no" to them without explanation?

— Do you insult them in front of other people?

— Do you scold them when they themselves know they are wrong?

Do you recognize yourself in any of these situations? If you feel that your children or spouse have grown distant from you, you can still remedy the situation. By accepting biblical principles and following them, your hope will be strengthened. The Holy Spirit will guide your path. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105).

1. Like the apostle Paul, we should ask, “God, what shall I do?” (Acts 9:6). I want God’s guidance and direction in all areas of my life. I ask Him to help me in my interactions with my family and those around me. I accept the path God has shown me instead of my own path.

2. “A gentle answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1).

   Kindness and gentleness melt away anger, resentment, hurt feelings, and rebelliousness. If we have behaved badly or spoken rudely, the Holy Spirit urges us to ask forgiveness from the person we have offended. We should pray with them and ask God to give them the strength to choose forgiveness and let go of what has happened. In some cases, we need to make amends for our actions.

3. “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord (Isaiah 1:18). Often, spouses, children, and friends want their feelings to be understood, their thoughts to be valued, and their hearts to be comforted. Even if you don't agree with them, the main thing is to stop and listen. If there is mutual trust and openness to discussion in the family, even deep emotional issues can be discussed together.

4. “If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). If we have lost our self-control and acted rashly, we must humble ourselves and ask forgiveness for our behavior. This may seem difficult. Apologizing has a healing effect on relationships. How much better it is to acknowledge our mistakes and weaknesses than to become estranged from one another. “Better to be slow to anger than to conquer a city” (Proverbs 16:32).

5. “Whoever acts prudently will prosper, and whoever trusts in the Lord will be blessed. A prudent person will be called wise, and skillful speech will win favor” (Proverbs 16:20–21). We will find much good in each other if we stop hurting those close to us. We need to pause and learn to evaluate our reactions in relation to heavenly principles (John 10:10; Eph. 4:31). Unkind behavior does not bear good fruit in relationships. When we ask God for help, He gives us wisdom and strength to act sensibly. Discussion

It can be difficult to broach the subject, especially if hurtful words are part of everyday life in the family. It is never too late to ask, *"Have I done something to hurt you?"* When we ask this question, we must give the other person time to respond. We must listen carefully to what they have to say, without interrupting or trying to correct the details. The other person's perspective on the matter is their reality, even if it differs from ours.

6. "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

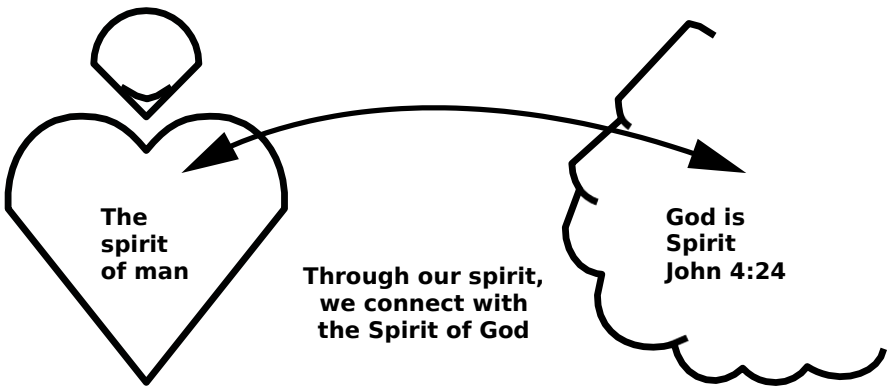
We must take care to keep our hearts and relationships healthy. Try to maintain good emotional connections with all members of your family.

7. Pray with your family. Learn together to bring your concerns before God.

It is difficult for a wounded spirit to connect with the Spirit of God.

The human spirit

"Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).



We must have a strong spirit in order to have a stronger connection with the Spirit of God.

Things that affect our spirit:

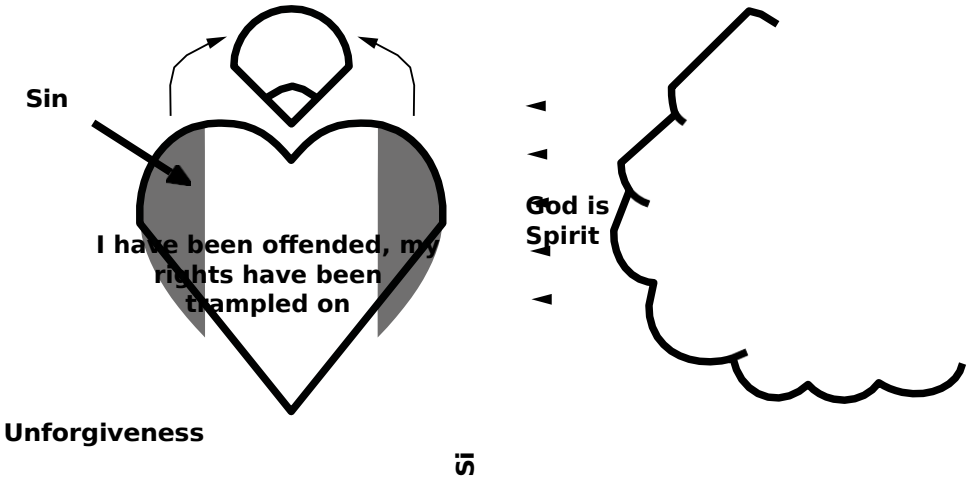
— Prolonged grief.

— Lack of love and acceptance causes the spirit to fall asleep (Rom. 13:11; Eph.
5:14; 1 Thess. 5:6).

— The body wastes away without food, and our spirit wastes away without connection to the Spirit of God (through God's Word and prayer).

— Sin. “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away” (Ps. 32:3–4).

— Worries, pain, doubts, etc.



Sin hinders spiritual connection (Ps. 36:1–2).

> **David's prayer: "God, create in me a pure heart and give me a new, strong spirit" (Ps. 51:12, VK).**

We receive spiritual communion with God through repentance and penance. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near! Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:2,8).

Ask God to strengthen your spirit and show you where you need to repent. Learn to maintain spiritual communion with God every day. Prayer is a good way to maintain spiritual communion. Bind your spirit to the Spirit of God every day. Stay in prayer, be still, and learn to

listen to what the Spirit reveals to you.

The Holy Spirit and the love of other people awaken the dormant spirit. The Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual life.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is an important part of a healthy personality. It determines how we act in our relationships with other people and with God. Our self-esteem determines whether we face challenges with courage or fear. Strong self-esteem is the foundation for success, and low self-esteem is a trap that easily leads to failure. God's approval is the best foundation for our self-esteem.

The biblical truth about us is this:

— We are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26; Romans 8:29). Sin has corrupted us. Through spiritual growth and the work of the Holy Spirit, we can glorify our Creator.

— Even though we have fallen into sin, we are not worthless. Even though we are sinners, God values us so much that He sent His Son to save us from our fallen state (Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10).

— God's love (John 3:16) strengthens our self-esteem!

How can you build a child's self-esteem?

— Tell your child often that you love them. If a child knows that their parents love them, it is easier for them to accept themselves.

— Praise your child's character traits more than their achievements.

— Encourage your child to express their opinions, feelings, and ideas. Try to be a good example for them!

— Teach your child to make constructive choices in life and to understand the consequences of those choices.

— Don't criticize your child's opinions, but talk to them to learn about their way of thinking.

— Always answer your child's questions honestly.

— Spend quality time with your child. Talk, play, and have fun with them.

— Apologize to your child if you have done something wrong. You will be rewarded with your child's respect. Children behave according to their role models.

— Pray with your child. It is good for them to learn how to bring things before God and ask for help. At the same time, they will learn to thank and honor God.

How does low self-esteem manifest itself?

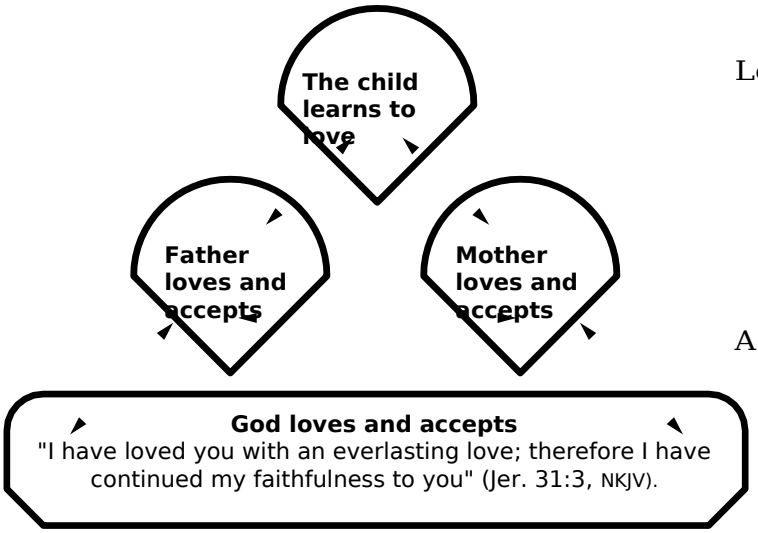
— People seek solace for painful feelings in various substitutes, such as pleasing others, compulsive behavior, or escapism.

— Intolerance towards others.

— Pride, arrogance, the need to control, intimidation, threats, or self-aggrandizement.

— Anger, guilt, and self-hatred, which lead to depression. In addition, nervousness, sadness, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, or increased appetite may occur.

— Parents' low self-esteem is reflected in their children.


The child learns to love
Father loves and accepts
Mother loves and accepts
God loves and accepts
"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer. 31:3, NKJV).

Loving parents support their children in developing their self-esteem.

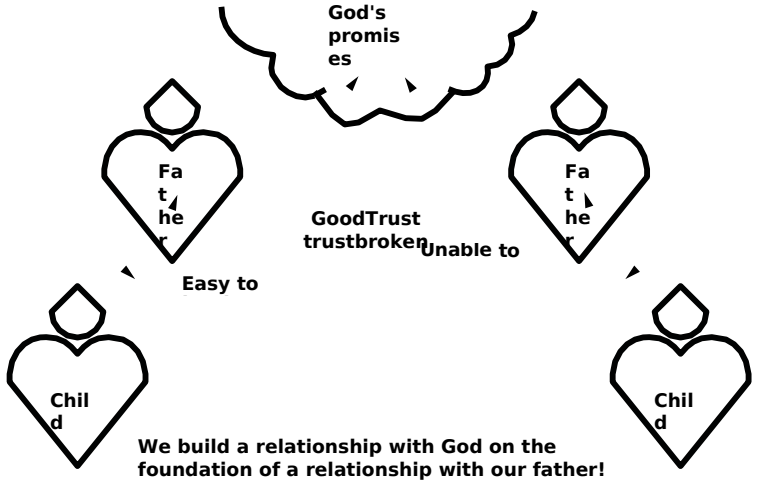
A strong foundation for self-esteem. Parents love God, each other, and their children.

Trust

“Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:3–4).

Trust is one of the basic needs of human beings. Trust builds confidence in another person. We can completely trust God because he will not betray us. Children learn the ability to trust from their parents and their environment. If parents are honest and genuine with their children and keep their promises to them, it is easy for children to learn to trust their parents and later God. But if a child's trust has been betrayed by empty promises, it is difficult to rebuild.

Heikki came from a poor family. When he was young, he wanted a bicycle, but his family couldn't afford one. Heikki decided to earn the money himself by helping his neighbors mow their lawns and do other small jobs. He was hard-working and earned money every week. He took the money he earned to the bank. After a year and a half, he had saved up enough money to buy a bicycle. He was very happy about it. One day, he went to the bank to withdraw the money he had earned to buy the bike he wanted. The bank clerk told him that his father had emptied his bank account. Heikki was very disappointed, his trust and spirit were broken. When I met Heikki, he was a grown man, but his father's actions still hurt him. After that, Heikki no longer saved money in the bank, but spent it. It was difficult for Heikki to learn to trust God and His wonderful promises. However, Heikki chose to forgive his father. We prayed that God would rebuild trust in his life and heal the wound in his heart caused by his father's abuse. Heikki also had a spirit of rebellion, which he confessed to God, and we commanded it to leave him in the name of Jesus.



Building trust in early childhood gives a child a foundation for trusting God and His promises later in life.

Hope

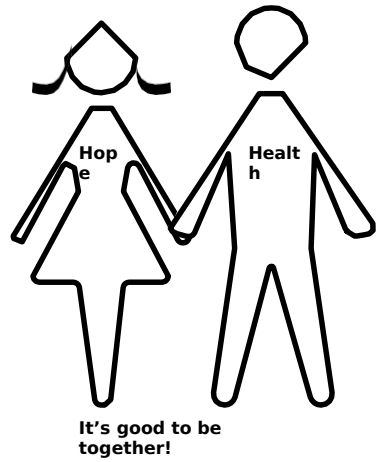
> **“We are saved, that is our sure hope. But hope that is already seen is no longer hope. Who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it patiently” (Rom. 8:24–25).**
>
> **“So, get ready, be sober. Keep your minds clear and put all your hope in the grace that will be given to you when Jesus Christ appears” (1 Peter 1:13).**

If a person is deprived of his wealth, it prevents him from moving forward; if he is deprived of his purpose or goal in life, his life slows down; but if he is deprived of hope, his life comes to a standstill. We can live without wealth, purpose, or goal for a time, but without hope we cannot go on.

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is the tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12, NKJV). The loss of hope makes the heart sick. Hope and survival are inextricably linked. It is a well-known fact that people must have hope, otherwise they begin to suffer. If hope for recovery or the future is lost, people let go of their grip on life. When hope disappears, the energy that sustains life disappears with it.

Hope and health go hand in hand.

“Cast all your cares on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).



Worries, troubles, difficulties, and trials rob us of hope and stifle our lives. Under heavy burdens, people are unable to take risks.

If we do not learn to surrender our burdens to God, the quality of our lives will gradually deteriorate.

The apostle Paul gives us good advice on how to behave.

> **“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith. You know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering” (1 Peter 5:8–9).**

“Keep your minds alert” means: believe in the truth, be strong, steadfast, and calm. “Be vigilant”: be attentive and aware that our adversary is on the loose. Whether we are aware of him or not, he is still lying in wait for us. Our adversary is cunning, highly intelligent, and has a lot of experience in deceiving, lying, and trying to break us. He hates and despises everything that represents God. Everyone who does God's work experiences difficulties. The enemy's goal is to defeat us in the battle against him. We must be vigilant so that he cannot deceive us with his lies. None of us is safe from our enemy. When we believe God's word, he promises to protect us.

“He will spread his wings over you, and you will be safe under them. His faithfulness is a shield and buckler” (Ps. 91:4). “Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord” (Ps. 31:25). “I will not give up my hope, nor will I cease to praise you” (Ps. 71:14). “It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

Remember that faith is the assurance of what we hope for. If you have lost hope, ask God to give you new hope so that you can regain your joy in life.

The Body

> **“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? This Spirit has been given to you by God to dwell in you. You do not belong to yourselves, for God has bought you at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies!” (1 Cor. 6:19–20).**

It is important to take care of your physical health. It matters to God how we care for ourselves. He wants our minds and bodies to be in the

best possible condition. There are people who do not care for themselves. Many are ruled by their appetite

and many other desires. Wrong habits cloud our moral judgment. Interest in God may disappear completely when we focus only on our own desires.

As Christians, we must be moderate in all areas of life, in eating, drinking, dressing, working, resting, sports, etc. Principles should govern us, not desires and passions. The more we satisfy our desires, the stronger they become, eventually enslaving us.

> **“Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim. 6:9).**

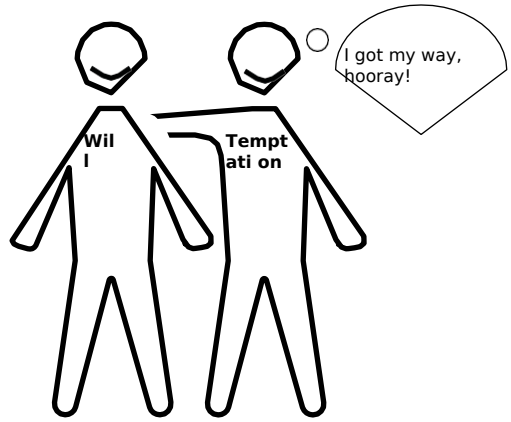
> **“Let no one think that temptation comes from God. God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. Each person is tempted when they are drawn away and enticed by their own desires. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death” (James 1:13–15).**

Temptations

1. Temptation

2. It entices, seduces, and draws you in. Desires deceive with their lies.

3. If the will chooses to give in to the seduction of desire, sin takes root in the mind and waits for the opportunity to be realized.



Sin is conceived.
Sin can live in the mind for a very long time.

4. When "sin has grown to full measure," the opportunity arises and sin takes control, because the choice has already been made. Falling into sin leads to death and separation from God.

The right way to deal with temptations

1. Temptation

2. Temptation entices, seduces, and draws us in. Desire tries to deceive us with false thoughts, but prayer connects us to God.

3. The will chooses truth, aligns itself with God's will, and remains strong: "But deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38).

4. Behavior: In accordance with God's will, because the will was given to God and the connection through prayer is working. Leads to eternal life.

If you have fallen into temptation, how can you escape it? The only way is through repentance and penance. True repentance changes the mind, thoughts, and attitude.

“Perhaps God will change their minds [it is God’s work, not ours] so that they may know the truth and escape the devil’s trap [lies] in which he has held them captive to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:25–26).

“Do you not realize that God’s kindness leads you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9).

— Has your foundation been broken?

— How has it made your life more difficult?

Anne came to me because her marriage was in serious trouble. They had two children. Both spouses considered themselves born-again Christians. I asked Anne about her part in the difficulties. Anne felt that the difficulties were her husband's fault. I talked with Anne until she admitted that she had fits of rage. She had tried unsuccessfully to get rid of them. We talked about her childhood and her home. Anne did not have any particularly painful memories from her childhood. I could not find anything significant in her life that could have been the root cause of her anger. Then we turned to God together and prayed for His help. I prayed that God would show Anne where the roots of her difficulties lay so that we could resolve them. After the prayer, I asked Anne to close her eyes for a moment so that the Holy Spirit could bring forgotten things to her mind.

After some time, the Holy Spirit opened up a painful memory from her childhood. Her mind had hidden this memory. Anne was about eight years old when she was home alone with her mother. Her mother was working in the garden when the phone rang. Anne answered the phone. Her older brother's girlfriend had asked if her brother was home. Anne replied that her brother was in town.

Later, when her mother came inside, Anne told her about the phone call. Her mother became furious, took a belt, and whipped Anne until she was bruised. Anne was in the corner of the room and had no way of escaping her mother's rage. In her mind, Anne condemned her mother's behavior and began to hate her. She also decided to take revenge on her mother as soon as the opportunity arose. Soon Anne forgot the whole thing. But the devil, who had cunningly planned the situation, did not forget Anne but held fast to his rights.

"Therefore you cannot defend yourself, poor human being, you who judge others, whoever you are. When you judge another, you also condemn yourself, because you, the judge of others, do the same things" (Rom.

2:1). “But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions” (Matt. 6:15). “And so you will be thrown into prison” (Matt. 5:25).

Prison

I

— the judgment

— anger

— revenge and

— unforgiveness in prison.

Anne was now a mother of two herself and was behaving just like her mother, whom she hated. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't break free from the pattern. She was at a dead end and went to seek help. I asked, "Have you chosen to forgive your mother?" Anne replied, "When I was a child, I didn't understand, and I haven't thought about it since." Anne chose to forgive her mother. She poured out a lot of pain from her heart. She confessed her judgment, hatred, and revenge to God and asked Him for forgiveness. God, in His mercy, freed Anne from many years of anguish. God opened her eyes to see what she had done to her family. When Anne went home, she was ready to humble herself before her family and ask them for forgiveness for her behavior.

Joy and peace flooded Anne's heart. God softened the hearts of her stepson and children so that the inner healing process began in them as well. Thank God that He is ready to help us when we humbly ask for help in our difficulties.

The Bible's promise came true in Anne's life:

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16).

Thoughts of suicide or self-destruction

Emma came to me because she was afraid of her self-destructive tendencies. The urge was so strong that she no longer had the strength to fight it. We talked about her childhood and her life. Emma told me that her late father was a pedophile. As far as Emma could remember, her father had abused her. When Emma was about seven years old, she found life very difficult because her mother was unable to protect her. She decided to commit suicide in some way.

God was unknown in Emma's home. In difficult life situations, her will aligned with the temptation of self-destruction, and sin took root in her mind. Now Emma was 38 years old, and this sin that had taken root had "grown to full size" and wanted to take over Emma's mind. Emma had suffered enough and was ready to confess her self- destruction to God and ask for forgiveness. She chose to forgive her father in order to be free from her feelings. Unforgiveness binds the offended to the offender with bonds of anger, bitterness, and revenge. Only when we choose forgiveness does God begin the work of healing in us and free us from the prison of anger, revenge, and bitterness. Emma also chose forgiveness for her mother, who had had no contact with her daughter.

I took Emma's hands in mine and prayed to God to free her. Emma's thoughts of self-destruction and all the injustice she had experienced because of Jesus. I asked God to give Emma a new heart and a new strong spirit. I asked God to reveal Himself to Emma and assure her of His love. The burden was lifted, and Emma chose to give her life to Jesus. She left me with a joyful heart. Since then, her life has been much brighter, and thoughts of self-destruction no longer trouble her.

Difficulties in life

I have a choice

Self-destructive thoughts and	I give my life and my difficulties to God.

Effects on life

- Self-destruction ties up energy – unwillingness to live
- depression
- eating disorders – overeating, anorexia
- substance abuse
- self-hatred – self-pity, loneliness
- inflicting pain on oneself, etc.

- God's promises
- The power of the Holy Spirit
- faith
- trust
- Truth
- God's mercy
- Support from friends
  Carries us through difficult life experiences.

“But if we walk in the light, as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

16

The Importance of Motherly Love

“Love is the foundation and basis of your life” (Ephesians 3:17).

— What kind of mother did we have? She has a great deal of influence on how our adult lives turn out.

— How did we react to our mother's behavior? Did we learn to love and trust, or to hate and reject?

If we had a negative relationship with our mother, a pattern of distrust may follow us throughout our lives. We all have needs in life that do not disappear on their own.

Needs that a mother should fulfill

Security

As children, we perceive the world as dangerous. We feel alone. A child does not have love within them, but they have great needs and feelings. You can see this pain in the face of a small child when they long for security, because their imagination easily creates fears. A small child naturally lacks inner security, which is why they easily sense danger. A child finds security in their mother or a close caregiver.

A mother who builds a strong and secure foundation for her child's life:

- is loving and accepting
- provides sufficient physical contact
- behaves calmly
- behaves predictably
- is in control of herself (free from addictions, outbursts of anger, sudden changes, shouting, raging, etc.).

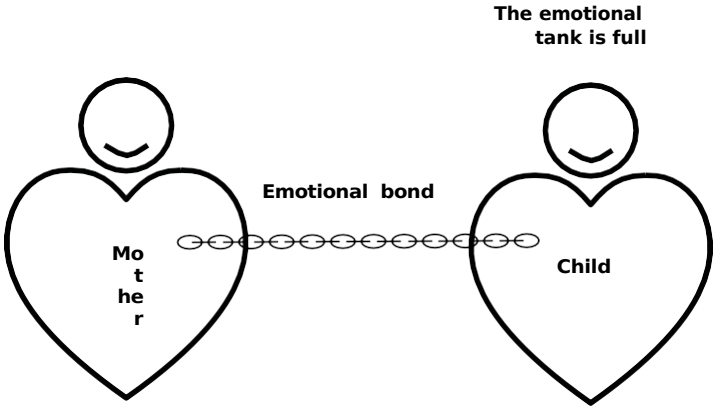
Without security, the child suffers from:

— panic – nervousness

— inability to love

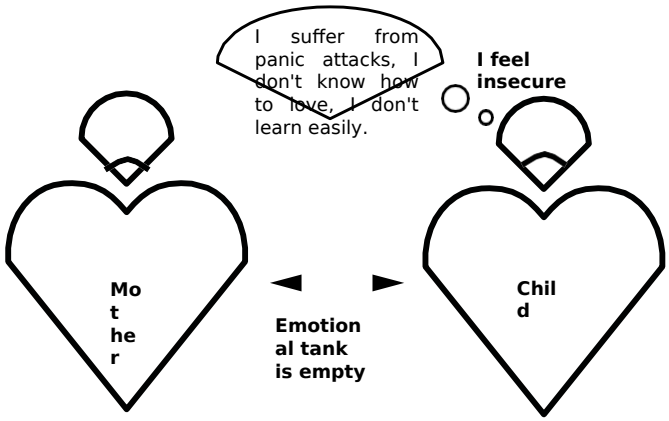
— learning difficulties

A mother must understand how to make her child's world safe.



Mothers build a good foundation for their children's lives!

- Love
- Predictability
- Acceptance
- Peace
- Touch
- Security


I suffer from panic attacks, I don't know how to love, I don't learn easily.
I feel insecure
Mother
Emotional tank is empty
Child

Emotional emptiness is one of the most difficult feelings a person can experience. A mother's behavior forms the basis for her child's behavior.

- Rejecting
- No contact or affection
- Nervous
- The future is

frightening and dangerous	• Overreacting • Em	otionally poor and stressed

Affection and caressing

A mother's caresses are like oil for a child's soul. A mother's care is like sunshine and water for plants. We grow, develop, and change according to how we are cared for. Without affection and caresses, we wither away. Many problems in childhood and even adulthood stem from a lack of affection.

Basic trust

Basic trust enables children to build close relationships. We need to experience many situations that inspire trust in our lives before we learn to trust other people. Trust is the result of learning. When we trust other people, we are able to face them, depend on them, express our needs, and see other people as a source of good things. We can commit ourselves to a person who is willing to take care of us when needed.

We give our hearts and our whole beings to a good mother. We can expect positive feedback and understanding from her. Trust gives us the courage to express our feelings and needs. It encourages commitment. These are qualities that adults need in close relationships.

The need to belong

We all have a need to belong to something greater than ourselves. Belonging and love are basic human needs. Experiencing closeness is the foundation of our existence. We cannot fulfill this need alone. “Love is the foundation and basis of your life” (Eph. 3:17). If we are rooted in God and other people, we have a sense of belonging. We feel cared for, secure, and free from feelings of isolation and loneliness.

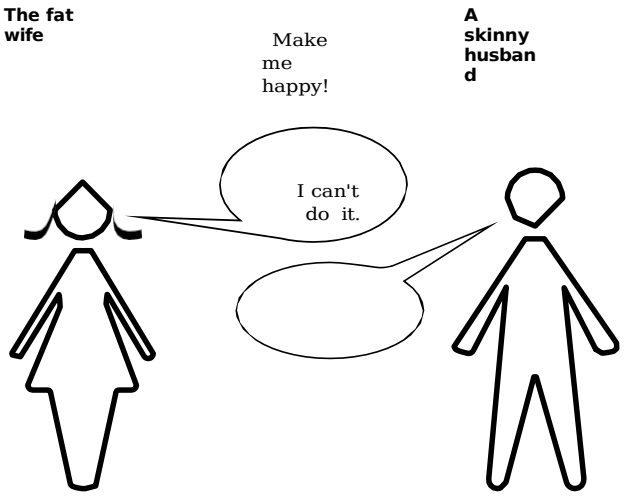
A mother's job is to teach us how to build good relationships. Through example, love, and care, she builds in us a sense of being wanted. Later in life, this feeling gives us a sense of dignity and self-confidence.

Some feel that they are "unaccepted" or "unwanted," even though in reality many people love and admire them. Unfortunately, they have lacked a good relationship with their mother. They have been deprived of their mother's love. On an intellectual level, they know that their parents did their best. If you have not experienced love on an emotional level, there is an empty hole in your heart. What you have not received, you cannot give to others.

Someone we can love

In order to develop emotionally, intellectually, and socially, we need to feel loved. Only then can we learn to give love in return. When we share love, it grows within us. When love fills our hearts, it colors our view of other people and the world. We see life as rich and bright.

Our basic need is to love. We need someone to love. If our mother is secure, we love her. If she is not secure, we isolate ourselves or our hearts fill with disappointment and anger. If there is a void in our hearts, we expect our friends or spouse to fill that void. Such a person sees their spouse as a prince or princess who will fill their empty heart. But the spouse cannot fulfill such a person's need for love because it is based on unrealistic demands and expectations.



An unhappy, lonely person may think that getting married will make them happy. In reality, they may just be looking to fill a void left by their mother. Happiness in life is a personal choice. It is the result of inner work. True happiness springs from the awareness of being a child of God, good and accepted.

Our value is measured by the cross, not by what we do or don't do.

Negative close relationships

If our childhood was insecure, we are at risk of drifting into negative close relationships. A mother's emotional poverty or unavailability casts a shadow over a child's life. Many studies have shown that a child's health, psychological development, and learning ability depend greatly on how well they were able to bond with their loved ones when they were young. Basic security grows from a strong relationship with the mother.

Consequences of attachment difficulties:

- poor risk-taking ability
- fear of failure
- difficulty accepting constructive criticism
- inability to cope with life's difficulties
- Crumbling feelings of guilt
- inability to use one's skills.

If we hope to succeed in life, the basic security provided by our mother is the best guarantee. People who have not been able to trust their own mother also have difficulty trusting God. Our relationship with our mother in particular affects our ability to trust, love, and accept love.

Try to be kind to people who are untrustworthy and unfriendly, because they need our love the most. We don't know their wounds or their sad past. Most of the time, these wounds are hidden from other people's eyes.

Arja came to me for help. She seemed like a happy person, even though her heart was bursting with pain. She had attempted suicide three times and was on medication. I talked to her and asked about her family and parents. She had no relationship with her mother. She had not been in contact with her parents for many years. Arja's story revealed that her mother suffered from misogyny and self-hatred, which she had subconsciously transferred to her daughter. Arja had frozen her negative feelings deep in her heart. She believed she could live happily without dealing with her feelings. However, they constantly affected her life and her dreams.

First, she chose to forgive her mother, even though the pain of her relationship with her mother was strong. Next, Arja chose to forgive herself and was ready to believe that God accepts and loves her. The Holy Spirit began the healing work in her heart. She asked me to be her mentor. In the beginning, she called me every day and told me about her experiences. Gradually, she grew stronger and no longer needed so much support and sympathy. Nowadays, we call each other maybe once a month. Arja has sorted out her life, and God has miraculously blessed and healed her. We met every other week for about a year before we got to the bottom of all the sadness and pain from her childhood. Sometimes it is hard to believe how cruel mothers can be to their own children.

The root cause of our wounds:

— if you have broken away from your past
— you are afraid to live in the present
— you are afraid of the future.

The cause of the wound	**Consequence**		**Symptoms in life**
• Neglect	• Pain	**D**	• lack of self-control
• bullying	• loneliness	**E**	• intense guilt
• abuse	• anger	**N**	• obsessions
• loveless and distorted behavior patterns in the family	• guilt	**Y I N**	• addictions
• rejection	• shame • sadness	**G**	• eating disorders • depression • anxiety • low self-esteem

God wants you to live

— in touch with your past
— content in the present moment

— hopeful about the future.

17

Our relationship with our father

Being a father is the most challenging task in a man's life.

There is no textbook that teaches how to be a good father. Men learn through experience, trial and error. In reality, many fathers are not good parents until they become grandfathers. Many well-meaning men are exhausted by the thought that they must be influential, successful, and efficient. Many fathers admit that they struggle to balance marriage, career, and fatherhood. Many feel trapped because they have a heavy workload and pressure from their employer. Many men feel that they lack fatherly skills, that they are incapable of being good husbands in difficult marriages, or that they lack the ability to deal with and help children and young people who behave badly or are otherwise mean and malicious.

The father himself may have a completely distorted model of family life, which he has acquired from his own home. We get our model of masculinity from our own father. If we have a good father figure, life is much easier. If we come from a home where there was violence, alcoholism, shouting, rage, betrayal, etc., a poor role model will affect our own marriage. If there has been no father in the family, children lack a male role model. I once asked someone who needed help what kind of father he was. He replied sadly, *"I never had a father, so I don't know what a good father is like."*

The challenges of fatherhood are much greater today than in the past. We live in a world where our marriages, family unity, and children are under threat. We live in a culture that rejects biblical truth, mocks biblical morality, glorifies sex and violence, and laughs at alcoholics, injustice, and wrongdoing. The role of the father has always been important. A child's relationship with his or her father is a crucial factor in the health, development, and happiness of a young man or woman.

Studies have shown that young people who have a close relationship with their parents:

- are more satisfied with their lives
- are happy to go to church
- stick to their daily prayers
- enjoy reading the Bible
- have higher moral standards
- behave better at school
- are more receptive to biblical truth.

Here are a few of the benefits that children gain from close family interactions.

In the absence of a father:

- juvenile crime increases
- adult crime is higher when the mother is a single parent
- the risk of developing anorexia increases
- weak identity
- affects the child's development
- Weakened motivation and performance
- Short temper
- risk of joining a gang
- insecure self-esteem.

Basic needs of a child that a father can fulfill

1. **Love and acceptance.** A father's sincere love strengthens a child's openness and basic security. If a child does not experience his father's love in accordance with his age- related needs, he will withdraw into his shell or hide behind masks. The father's task is challenging, but fortunately God is ready to give him all the wisdom and skill he needs during his child's upbringing. An insecure child does not want to be transparent. He does not talk about what happens at school or how he is treated there. The more you give your child unconditional love and acceptance, the more they will want to openly share their thoughts, concerns, and challenges with you. As sinners, we must accept our children's limitations. If we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us, we can build a close relationship with our children.

As a father, how can I show my children unconditional love and acceptance?

2. **Show affection and touch them.** One of a child's basic needs is to receive affection and touch. What a huge impact it has on a child's life to receive affection, touch, kind words, and a loving gaze!

3. **Be interested in the uniqueness of each of your children.** God created each of us to be unique. It is the parent's job to convey to each child their uniqueness in a positive way by saying, for example, *"You are my favorite daughter, I am proud*

of you" or *"You are my favorite son, it's great to be your father."*

Also remember to acknowledge their abilities and gifts.

4. **Strengthen your child's personal growth.** Children need to feel that they are valuable. Children need to be made to believe and feel that they are valuable human beings. Fathers can convey personal value to their children in many different ways:

   — Spend time with them (playing, gaming, etc.).

   — Talk to your child about things that are important to them.

   — Eat meals together.

   — Take an interest in your child's school, hobbies, friendships, etc.

5. **Cultivate a sense of belonging.** If a child does not feel a sense of belonging to their family, they will look for a support group elsewhere. Some seek acceptance through extramarital sexual relationships. A father can express his love by saying, for example, *"You are a valuable member of our family; we need you."*

6. **Reassure your child that their value is greater than their abilities or achievements.**

7. **Be a reliable father.** If you promise something to your child, keep your promise. Many fathers make a big mistake by not keeping their promises. Children hold on to them. Children may think: *"Dad has more important things to do than take care of my needs," "Dad isn't interested in me,"* or *"I'm insignificant to Dad."* Behavioral patterns are learned from parents.

8. **Be a responsible father.** Many parents are surprised when I ask them to take responsibility for their behavior toward their children. They may think, *"Children should take responsibility for their behavior toward their parents. Parents have special privileges."*

We were on vacation with a family. In the evening, the girl asked her father for an apple. The father thought it was too late to eat. The girl went to bed. The next evening, just before going to bed, the father ate some fruit himself. The daughter said, "I wasn't allowed to eat an apple last night, and now you're eating whatever you want." The father replied, "I'm the father. I have my own rights." The girl's trust in her

father began to crumble.

His behavior did not strengthen their relationship. Children have the right to point out inconsistencies in their parents' behavior. A responsible father raises children who understand responsibility.

9. **Teach children clear boundaries.** The best way to protect our children from sexual abuse, for example, is to teach them that no one is allowed to touch certain parts of their body.

10. **Teach children to respect other people's boundaries.**

    — Do not insult others.

    — Respect others' refusal to participate without punishment or rejection.

    — Adhere to general standards of decency.

    — Respect other people's differences.

    — What you sow, you will one day reap.

> The greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother. At the same time, children get a good example of masculinity and marriage.

We build our relationship with God on the foundation of our relationship with our father. Fathers, make sure your relationship with your children is open and trustworthy! Then it will be much easier for children to learn to trust their heavenly Father.

18

Forgiveness

“If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14–15).

A woman came to me because she was very ill. The doctors could not find the cause of her illness. She just lost weight and wasted away. I talked with her, and it became clear that she was bitter, even though she was a believer. Her husband had cheated on her shortly after they got married more than 30 years ago. They had children. The man had deeply regretted his actions and asked his wife for forgiveness, but she was unable or unwilling to forgive him. In her mind, she replayed the painful event until it had grown like a snowball. Now she was over 60 years old. The root of bitterness had grown into a large tree in her heart and wreaked havoc on her own life and that of her entire family. "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Hebrews 12:15).

God's word tells us what will happen to us if we do not forgive. "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you? In his anger, the king put his servant in prison until he paid the entire debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matt. 18:33-35).

I explained to the woman what forgiveness is and what it is not, and that she could be freed from her "harsh imprisonment" only by choosing to forgive her spouse. I told her that she should do it for her own sake. I asked her permission to pray for her. I took her hand and prayed fervently that God would give her the strength to choose forgiveness. I also prayed that Jesus would take the bitterness out of her heart and nail it to the cross at Calvary. Jesus died so that we might live. After praying, I looked her in the eyes and asked her, "In the name of Jesus, are you ready to choose forgiveness for your spouse for his affair?" She replied, "It hurts too much to forgive him." I told her that it would hurt her much more if she did not choose forgiveness. However, he chose unforgiveness.

I later heard from this woman that she had died within a year of our meeting. I hope that the Holy Spirit spoke to her before her death.

What forgiveness is not

Many of us have an unclear picture of forgiveness because we do not understand its true nature.

— **Forgive and forget.** Many people believe that if you cannot forget an offense, you have not forgiven it. If that were true, only those who have lost their memory would be capable of forgiveness. Important things are worth remembering. Otherwise, we lose important experiences and forget to protect ourselves. If someone has stolen money from me, I have learned that I cannot trust them with money, even though I have forgiven them. Forgiveness is between me and God. Reconciliation always involves both parties. If the person who stole my money comes to me, confesses, apologizes for their behavior, and returns the stolen amount, I can rebuild my trust in them.

— **Forgiveness does not erase the memory of the event or change the reality of life.** Forgiveness gradually takes away the pain. The greater the offense we forgive, the longer it takes to heal. Every time you feel pain knocking at your door, give it to God to heal. Little by little, the pain will disappear, but the memory will remain.

— **Forgiveness includes saying, "It's OK."** Can wrongdoing against us ever be right? Of course not. Wrongdoing is wrongdoing, even when forgiven. Forgiveness never makes wrongdoing right or removes the consequences of the act. Forgiveness defines who you are as a child of God.

— **Forgive and make reconciliation.** Forgiveness is a matter between a person and God. Forgiveness can lead to reconciliation or reconciliation, but this is not always the case. Reconciliation requires at least two people or all parties, but forgiveness requires only one person. Even if the other party refuses to resolve the issue, that does not prevent us from forgiving them.

We can forgive completely regardless of the other party, but after that we must set boundaries so that the other party does not have the opportunity to hurt us again. In many cases of hurt, our trust has been betrayed, and rebuilding it can take a long time or may never happen.

— **Forgive and release others.** In reality, forgiveness can include mercy or absolution, but it doesn't have to be that way. You can forgive people and still hold them accountable for the consequences of their actions. For example, if your friend crashes your car, you forgive your friend, but they have to pay for the repairs and the depreciation of the car. Forgiveness does not remove the law of cause and effect. What changes is your desire to retaliate or pay back in kind. Forgiveness frees you from the desire for revenge.

What happens if we hold on to unforgiveness?

A person who chooses not to forgive burns the bridge they need to cross. They do not understand the consequences of their choice.

— **When we hold on to unforgiveness, we cannot see reality, but have a limited view of the matter.** In this way, our minds are bound to the pain we experience. “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. If your eyes are bad, your whole body is dark. So if the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matt. 6:22–23). “But if I do what I don’t want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin that dwells in me. So I find this law at work in me: I want to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Rom. 7:20–21). The sin that dwells in me, unforgiveness, blinds my eyes so that I cannot see the light that shines from forgiveness.

"I mean those whose minds the god of this world has blinded, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). The voice of sin in me is strong, but the voice of forgiveness is even stronger.

— **When we choose unforgiveness, we are cut off from God's grace, and the atmosphere around us becomes very negative.** "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (Hebrews 12:15).

— **When we hold on to unforgiveness, our own sins become our burden.** "But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:15). If we are unwilling to forgive those who have sinned against us, how can we expect God to forgive our sins? We reap what we sow.

— **If we do not forgive, we are vulnerable to Satan's attacks.** "Whom you forgive, I also forgive; and when I have forgiven—if there is anything to forgive—I have done so on your behalf before Christ, so that Satan might not gain an advantage over us. We know his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:10–11). The enemy of our souls wants to use every unforgiven thing to cause discord, hatred, evil speech, etc. In this way, he seeks to undermine the unity of God's children. We should resist the enemy's attempts to control our lives by letting go of unforgiveness and bitterness.

— **Unforgiveness builds a wall around us.** "You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness" (Luke 11:39). Jesus wants us to be completely honest, genuine, transparent, trustworthy, and consistent. He wants to change our hearts so that we can be genuine and shine God's light into this dark world.

— Unforgiveness causes physical and mental exhaustion.

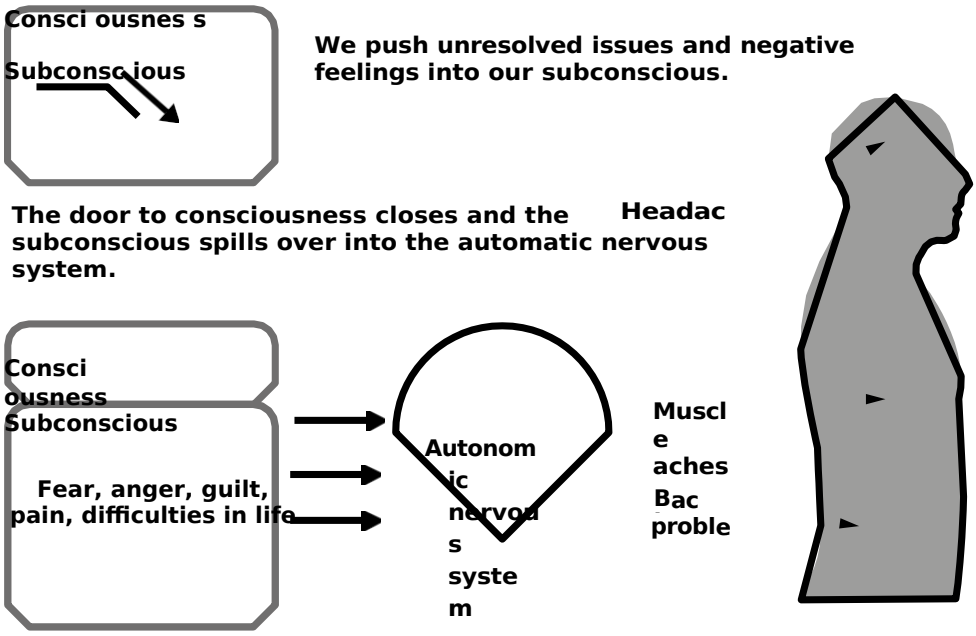
I treated a man who had been off work for a year due to exhaustion. He had had a difficult childhood and a harsh and demanding father. The man was sensitive. He had learned to strive for perfection at home. As a child, he had not learned to forgive or to deal with his own negative feelings. He had only learned to keep quiet and push everything into his subconscious. This led to exhaustion.

The man did not understand why he was always tired. He spent most of his day in bed because of back and muscle pain. We worked through his difficult life experiences with him, and he surrendered them to God for healing. Difficult life situations can rarely be resolved alone. Often, professional help is needed! We worked through his relationship with both his father and mother. He chose from his heart to forgive his parents for the difficulties he had experienced as a child. A child sees things through the eyes of a child, and a child's truth is not always the same as a parent's truth. We took all these things to the cross and prayed together for God's healing power. We also asked for a new heart and a new spirit within him. "I will give you a new heart and a new spirit within you. I will remove the stony heart from your flesh and give you a living heart. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26–27). We asked God to break this pattern of striving for perfection in his life and to create a new, constructive pattern in his mind. "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

Demanding perfection from yourself or others leads to stress. After we worked through all the painful feelings, he chose to forgive from his heart everyone who had hurt him. His zest for life and joy returned. The weight was lifted from his shoulders, and after a few weeks he was ready to go back to

work.

The following image of the autonomic nervous system illustrates how the body behaves in a stressful situation.


Consci ousnes s
Subconsc ious
We push unresolved issues and negative feelings into our subconscious.
The door to consciousness closes and the subconscious spills over into the automatic nervous system.
Headac
Consci ousness
Subconscious
Fear, anger, guilt, pain, difficulties in life
Autonom ic nervou s syste m
Muscl e aches
Bac proble

The autonomic nervous system releases pressure in our bodies in the form of various illnesses (insomnia, stomach problems, irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia, spinal and back problems, muscle pain, headaches, etc.). There may be other causes for these illnesses.

What is forgiveness?

— **Forgiveness brings peace to our minds when we do not take offense personally**. It is important to take responsibility for our own feelings and choose to rise above offense. We are winners when we do not give in to offense.

We have a choice:

— We blame the other person and place all responsibility for our recovery on them. When we blame others, we become submissive and feel innocent. The offender is the evil culprit. The advantage of the submissive person is that they

are innocent. That is why many people do not give up blaming. They fear that their innocence will be weakened and that the guilty party will not suffer enough for their words or actions.

  - We forgive and take responsibility for ourselves and our feelings. Everyone is responsible for their own life. How we behave in an offensive situation reveals what kind of people we are.

- **Forgiveness = we give up our right to revenge.** "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). The desire for revenge hurts us more than it hurts the offender. Forgiveness helps us more than it helps the offender. Forgiveness is clearly a better choice than revenge. In everyday life, people hurt us and treat us unfairly. This cannot be completely avoided. It is best that we learn to deal with these hurts.
- Our true friends are people who recognize their own weaknesses and forgive us when necessary.
- **Forgiveness is a process that can take a long time.** Healing emotions is often slow because we have to face our own negative feelings, anger, fears, sadness, and pain from the past and work through them one experience at a time. The goal is peace of heart and hope for the future. "Dear friends, since we have made such a promise, we must cleanse ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, and make ourselves holy for God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). Impurities of the body include excessive appetite and lust, as well as distorted sexual relationships. Impurities of the spirit include anger, bitterness, malice, pride, etc.

Forgiveness is divided into two parts:

1. How do we deal with painful memories?
   - We hate them and blame others for them.
   - We brood over them in our minds.
   - We talk about them constantly.
   - We deny their existence.
   - We forgive and turn the lessons learned to our advantage.

2. How do we deal with painful memories from our past?

If a child is constantly insulted, belittled, called names, pushed down, or abused, they make a decision in their mind: *"I will never let anyone control me again. As long as I live, I will decide my own affairs."* Through these decisions, a spirit of rebellion begins to grow. The Bible says, "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Sam. 15:23). Perhaps you are thinking, *“How could I submit to someone whose will I cannot trust, and how could someone else know what is best for me? From now on, I will make my own decisions.”*

Our painful memories are the result of mistreatment, abuse, etc., which, if left untreated, remain in our hearts as pain, rebellion, stubbornness, or obstinacy. These masks are self-defense mechanisms that lead to isolation. We can change our masks, but behind them there is no growth or development. People who have been hurt and wounded many times attract other wounded and hurt people. The oppressed and hurt often marry each other. As a result, they hurt each other without realizing it. Children follow their parents' example, and thus the abuse and mistreatment continues into the next generation. "A student is not above his teacher, but when he is fully trained, he will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). This continues until someone, with God's help, breaks the cycle. Do you want to break the distorted patterns in your family? You can choose to follow Jesus and his example, or you can choose your own automatic emotions, habits, and family patterns. You can say, *“Enough is enough! This pattern ends here. I choose God’s way, because Jesus conquered everything for me on the cross. I give my heart to him, and he has the right to work as the victor in my life.”*

1. Be aware of the things you have rejected in the past.

2. Choose to confront them. You can write down how you felt and what you believed about yourself during the insult. For example, *"I am bad," "It is right that I am insulted or ridiculed," "Everything is my fault," "This is completely wrong for me,"* or *"I do not understand why some people are so cruel, harsh, and insensitive towards me,"* etc. Try to unpack all your feelings related to the issue or event, such as anger, fear, guilt, rebellion, stubbornness, pride, etc. When you are able to get in touch with your wounded feelings, write them down on paper as well. It is easier to overcome feelings that you have identified.

3. Choose to forgive everyone who has hurt you. Name the people and

what they have done to you. You can pray as follows: *"Dear God, forgive me for my anger, resentment, and hatred toward these people.*

Today, I forgive (name) for (action or words). I open my heart and ask you to take away all the negative feelings that this offense has caused in me. Nail them to the cross at Golgotha, for you died so that I might live. Give me a new pure heart and a new strong spirit. Speak also to the person who hurt me. Let the light of your love shine in their heart too. Then take the text you have written on paper to God in prayer and humbly ask him to forgive your sins and mistakes. “If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Then place a red cross over the writing, because now they are forgiven and in God’s hands. When the devil tries again to tempt you to dwell on your suffering, resist him in your mind and say to the devil, *“Talk to Jesus about it, because I no longer have anything to do with it.”* Every time temptation comes, resist it in Jesus’ name, and victory will be yours. Remember that God loves you, He is greater than your difficulties, and He wants to improve the quality of your life.

If your problems seem too big or you don't know where they come from, seek professional help. If you notice bad habits or character flaws that run in your family, take all your difficulties to Jesus in faith and surrender them to His blood. He will gladly take them away from your life and create something new and beautiful in their place. Don't look back and cling to your past. Look forward to the great future that Jesus has planned for you.

Ulla was brought to me after having two back surgeries, but the pain did not subside. She was able to sit for a short time and walk only a few steps. Therefore, she was in constant pain. I soon realized that the pain was also in her heart. I asked her about her life, her home, her children, etc. The cause of her pain was soon discovered. Her spouse had been tragically murdered, and the perpetrator had not been caught. Upon hearing this, Ulla had gone into shock and did not dare to deal with the grief and pain caused by her husband's death. She had shut everything out of her mind. Since many years had passed since the event, I asked her if she had thought about forgiving the murderer. This was a difficult question.

but I wanted to help her be free from her pain and back problems. Ulla was a Christian and understood God's will, but she had never been able to think this way before. She chose to forgive the guilty party. I then took her by the hands and prayed fervently for God's healing power in her life. During the prayer, Ulla burst into tears and cried for about 30 minutes against my shoulder. She released the grief and pain that she had not dared to feel for many years. She left feeling relieved. The burden on her heart was gone.

The next day, she came back cheerfully and said that her back pain had eased and she was able to walk and sit better. A few days later, she was able to walk two kilometers, which made her happy, and her back pain was disappearing.

Releasing our resentments and forgiving others frees us from “hard bondage” (Matt. 18:34) and releases healing powers in our bodies. I have treated many people with back pain who have been healed after releasing their emotions and forgiving others. I hope the importance of forgiveness has become clear. God wants to begin His healing work in your life too.

19

Two selves

We all have two selves.

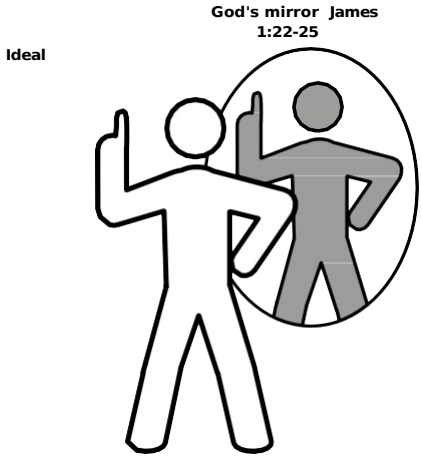
The real self:

- character traits
- heredity
- weaknesses
- strengths

Ideal self:

- Desired self
- Dreams
- close relationships
- hobbies
- goals
- ideal profession

Sometimes it is difficult for us to accept our true selves because the foundations of our lives have been broken or we believe ourselves to be worthless. It is easier to live in a fantasy world than to face the truth.



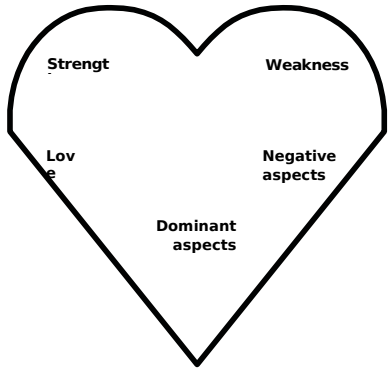
"They do not know what God's righteousness is, and in trying to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to the righteousness that comes from God" (Rom. 10:3).

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

The real me

Weaknesses:

- Careless use of money
- carelessness
- indifference
- lack of self-control
- unreliability
- Anger
- closed-mindedness



Negative aspects of my personality:

- joylessness and ingratitude
- judgmental, critical, etc.

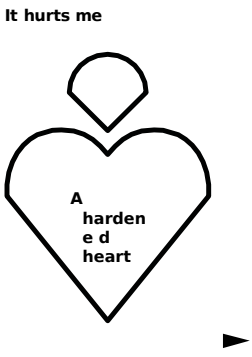
Dominant aspects of self:

- blaming • withdrawal • outbursts of anger • silent treatment, etc.

Strengths:

- good listener
- empathy
- reliability
- sense of responsibility
- self-control
- Patience
- caring
- cheerfulness and gratitude
- humility

We must accept our own weaknesses and strengths; only then can we strive to change something. The biblical advice is: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 19:19).



Pride Disappointment
Fear Rebellion
Shame
Stubbornnes
s,
etc. Anger

When our true selves are hurt or

wounded, we hide them from others behind walls and masks.

Walls - masks

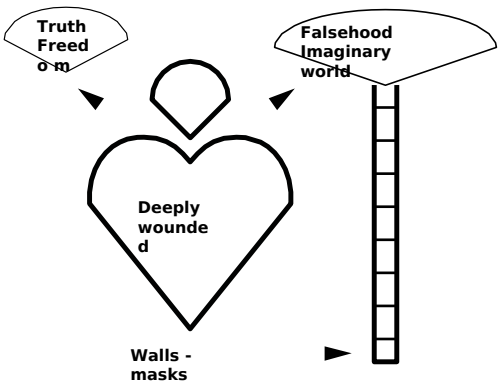
“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion” (Hebrews 3:15).

When our true selves are hidden behind walls or masks, we live in a state of blindness, unable to see or hear. “I speak to them in parables, because they see but do not perceive, and hear but do not listen or understand. In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled: 'Hear and do not understand; look and do not see. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can scarcely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them'" (Matt. 13:13– 15).

God's voice cannot be heard through walls and cannot reach our true selves. Pain is a good teacher that can break down walls and remove masks. It can lead us to repent and make amends in our lives! The choice is ours!

Ways to avoid facing ourselves:

- workaholism
- substance abuse
- striving for perfection
- controlling others
- materialism
- pursuit of pleasure, etc.



Behind the walls and masks lies a bleak and desolate reality.

The wounded person feels the need to escape into a fantasy world.

The Bible gives us many good guidelines for life!

“With your help I can run over a wall. With my God I can leap

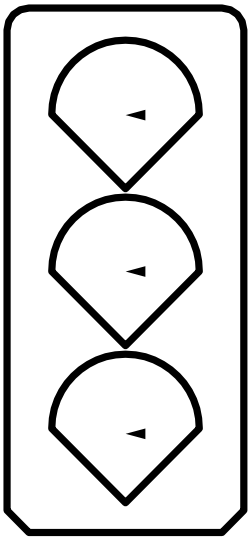
over a wall” (Ps. 18:30).

With God's help, we can leap over the walls we have built and find freedom. We can escape from prison by choosing truth and forgiveness.

"In his anger, the king put his servant in prison until he paid the entire debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matt. 18:34–35). "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2, NKJV). "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21, NKJV). "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37, NKJV).

Parts of the Self

Healthy self

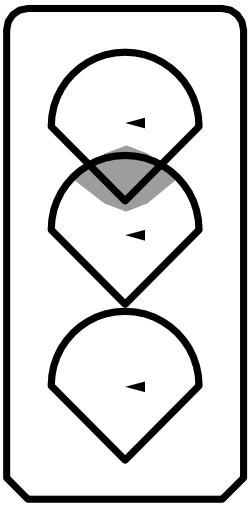


Parents	From them we learn lifestyles, attitudes, values, behavioral patterns, etc.
Adult self	Built on the models and values received from one's parents, striving to control one's life.
Child self	Emotions, experiences, and childhood memories.

Often, all parts of my identity need Jesus' healing touch.

"If your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, then your whole body will be full of light, as when a lamp gives you light with its rays" (Luke 11:36). "You, Lord, light my lamp; you, God, bring light to my darkness" (Ps. 18:29).

Bound self



Parents

Adult self

Child self

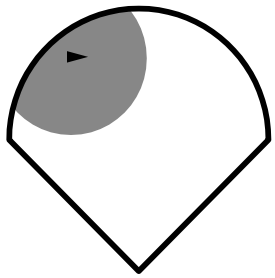
The part representing the parents controls the adult self.

The part representing the adult self has remained emotionally weak.

The part representing the child self is wounded or hurt. It controls the adult self through tantrums, rage, escapism, rebellion, defiance, name-calling, etc.

Encountering the negative part of the child

Negative aspects of the child: tantrums, anger, shouting, desire to control parents in various ways, etc.



Parents are often at a loss when it comes to their child's behavior. They feel helpless or overreact. When situations escalate, it is wise to pray with the child. This calms the minds of both parties. God gives parents wisdom in their parenting when they ask for it.

If parents do not know how to or do not want to learn to deal with their child's negative self, the consequences include:

— The child does not learn to ask for or give forgiveness.

— They do not learn to control the negative part of themselves, but deny its existence.

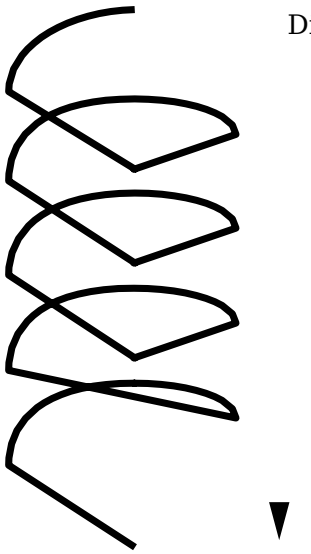
— They only see this part in others and learn to judge it.

— They flee from intimacy.

— They do not accept or love this part of themselves.

— Self-hatred grows.

A downward spiral begins to affect different areas of life.



Difficulties in close relationships:

- The need for constant approval from others and the desire to please others (Gal. 1:10).
- The self is bound up with shame, which manifests itself as a fear of revealing one's true self.
- Striving for perfection.
- Inauthenticity.
- A tendency toward depression, guilt, shame, obsessions, addictions, etc.
- Blindness to God's love, forgiveness, and mercy.

An example of an adult whose life is not working – the adult self is tied to the parents.

Unless I leave my parents, I cannot join myself to my spouse in a healthy way.

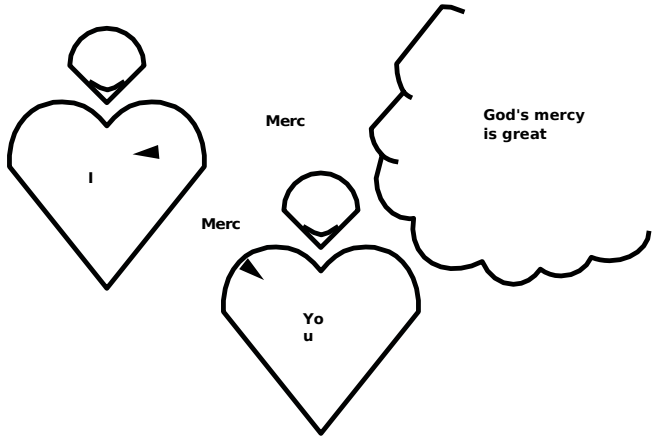
“I will sing and praise the Lord’s mercy forever. I will proclaim your faithfulness from generation to generation: your mercy endures forever, your faithfulness is as strong as the heavens” (Ps. 89:2–3).

“Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let their joy be everlasting. You protect those who love you; you are their source of joy. You, Lord, bless the righteous; your kindness protects them like a shield” (Ps. 5:12–13).

A person who hates within himself cannot internalize God’s wonderful promises.

Receiving mercy

“Whoever does not show mercy will receive a harsh judgment, but whoever shows mercy will receive a joyful judgment” (James 2:13).



Our relationship with God is based on His mercy.

If we want to grow as Christians, we must accept the truth about ourselves and learn to love our true selves. Jesus comes to dwell only in our true selves, never in our ideal selves.

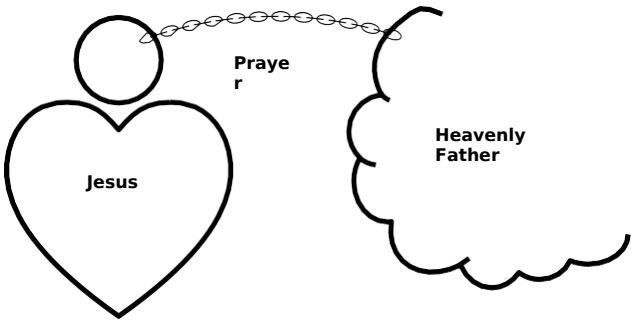
20

Teach us to pray

Once, when Jesus had been praying, one of his disciples asked, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1).

The disciples watched with interest as Jesus dealt with challenging situations. Jesus always showed mercy, strength, and dignity toward people. What was his secret? Where did he get his inner strength and great wisdom?

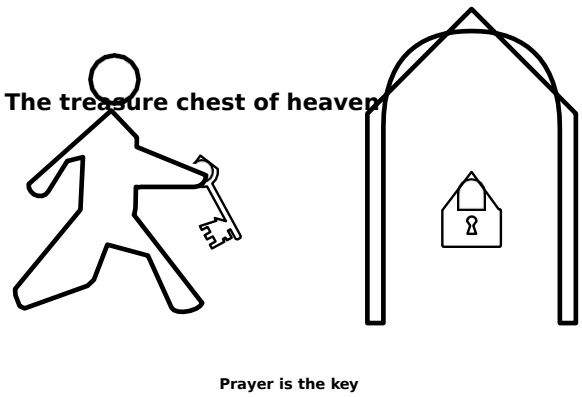
The secret of Jesus' strength, wisdom, and mercy was prayer. He resorted to it in all situations in his life:



— when he was exhausted
— when he needed closeness
— when choosing coworkers
— when he faced temptations
— when he was criticized
— when he was hungry
— when he was sad.

There was nothing in Jesus' life that he could not bring before God in prayer.

Because our prayers reach heaven, they have something eternal about them, just like God. Jesus loves to teach us how to pray. Prayer is communication with him. Prayer touches his heart, and that is why it is the key to everything good in our lives.



Prayer is the key that unlocks the treasure chest of heaven. From there we receive the blessings that God has reserved for us.

We can bring everything we need before God in prayer. Everything God does, for example in evangelism, is the result of prayer.

— Prayer is a way to resist the devil (Luke 22:31–32).

— Through prayer, those who have strayed can be brought back to the right path (James 5:16, 20).

— Through prayer, the sick are healed (James 5:13–15).

— Through prayer, the saints are strengthened (Jude 1:20; Matt. 26:41).

— Through prayer, workers are brought to God's harvest (Matt. 9:38).

— Through prayer, even the impossible can be achieved (Mark 11:23–24).

— Through prayer, we overcome temptations (Luke 22:40, 46).

— Through prayer, love, understanding, and discernment grow (Phil. 1:9).

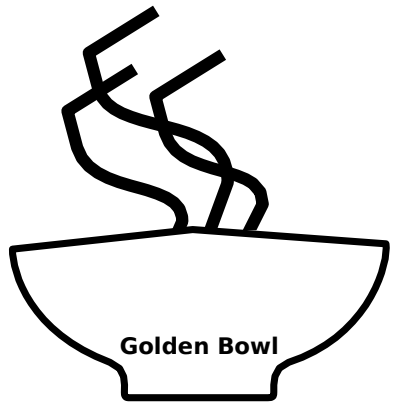
— Through prayer, we gain spiritual wisdom and understanding in knowing God's will (Col. 1:9, James 1:5).

— Through prayer, the word of the Lord spreads rapidly (2

Thess. 3:1). Everything God wants to do in your life, He wants

to accomplish through prayer.

Our prayers are so precious to Jumala that he gathers them together around his throne to form a sweet fragrance. “When the Lamb took the book, the four living creatures and the twenty- four elders fell down before him. Each of the elders had a harp and a golden bowl filled with the smoke of sacrifices, the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 5:8).



A person without prayer is like a bird without wings!

When his disciples asked, “Lord, teach us to pray,” Jesus responded by giving them what is perhaps the most popular model of prayer. It is called the Lord’s Prayer. This model prayer contains an amazingly timeless perspective on prayer.

> **"Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:9-13).**

This is a magnificent, simple, powerful, and rich treasure of prayer. This prayer guides us into the secrets of prayer. There are seven perspectives:

1. **Worship**: “Father, hallowed be your name.” In our value system, God should be given first place.

2. **Submission:** "Your kingdom come." We must surrender our entire lives to His guidance.

3. **Petition:** "Give us this day our daily bread." We ask Him for both physical and spiritual nourishment.

4. **Confession:** “Forgive us our sins.” We repent of our sins and make a genuine change of heart. Genuine repentance changes our hearts and minds. “Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25–26).

5. **Forgiveness.** Choosing to forgive everyone who has wronged us frees us from the prison of anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness.

6. **Protection:** “Lord, do not let us fall into temptation.” When temptation tempts us, it is wisest to ask God for the strength to resist it!

7. **Deliverance:** “Deliver us from evil.” Free us from our sins through repentance and penance. Deliver us from fear, addictions, Satan’s lies, restlessness, difficult past experiences, the evil words of others (Ps. 91:3), and everything else that still holds us captive.

The deepest secrets and most memorable experiences of prayer are not revealed by reading books or listening to lectures. We receive our most personal and powerful experiences on our knees in our prayer rooms before God's throne of grace. The more we pray, the more we learn about prayer and grow as prayer warriors. Nothing can be achieved without practice and practical experience. Prayer is also meaningful work.

Personal prayer

“Lord, teach us to pray” is a good foundation for a life of prayer. This request acknowledges that God is the teacher and prayer is the lesson. When we begin to pray, we can also experience that the indescribable treasures of prayer await us.

The treasures of prayer:

- success and blessing in different areas of life
- the right direction in life
- the fulfillment of dreams
- forgiveness
- wisdom
- miracles
- strength for everyday life
- freedom from chains
- help with raising children
- freedom from bitterness, anger, shame
- growth in faith, experiencing God's grace.

Here are a few tips for prayer:

1. **Time for prayer.** Try to set aside a fixed time each day for prayer and Bible study. It could be first thing in the morning, last thing at night, or even during your lunch break at work.

2. **Prayer time.** Set aside 20 minutes to an hour each day for Bible study and prayer. That time can become a life-changing experience.

3. **Place of prayer.** Jesus spoke of a prayer closet. Your place of prayer can be at your kitchen table or desk, in your bed, or you can go for a prayer walk.

4. **A prayer partner.** Jesus promised a special blessing where two or three pray together (Matthew 18:19).

5. **Don't delay.** Decide that you will not skip prayer for even nine days in your life. In fact, why not start praying like the disciples did, asking, "Lord, teach me to pray." Ask God for help to grow into a strong person of prayer.

How can you know that God really listens to prayers? How can you be sure that your requests are in accordance with God's will? What kind of prayer makes a special impression on God?

Jesus told a parable about two men. It provides the answer to these questions. To those who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on others, Jesus told this story:

> **“Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed to himself, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, cheats, adulterers—or even like that tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I earn.’ The tax collector stood at a distance. He did not even dare to raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner!' I tell you, he went home justified, but the other did not. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9–14).**

In Jesus' story, the Pharisees represented the superficial, outwardly moralistic, strictly legalistic, self-righteous extremes of Judaism. The tax collectors, on the other hand, collected taxes from their own brothers and sisters for the benefit of Rome. This made them traitors in the eyes of their own people.

The Pharisee's ineffective prayer

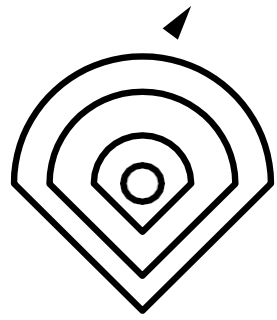
The Pharisee stood up and prayed to himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, cheats, adulterers, or even that tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of everything I earn." Jesus shows us the reasons why God refused to answer the Pharisee's prayer.

— The Pharisee was self-centered. His prayer was focused on himself. God's heart is anything but selfish, so this prayer was foreign to him.

— The Pharisee was self-righteous. He considered himself above inappropriate behavior. The self-righteous like to talk about the mistakes of others. God does not need our help to see the failings of others.

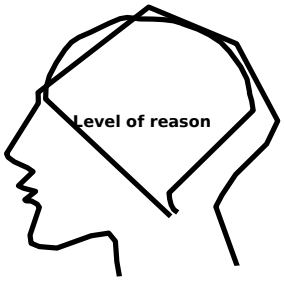
— The Pharisee was self-righteous. He not only told God what he did not do, but also what he did do. He believed that his good deeds set him apart from ordinary sinners. People who are satisfied with themselves like to talk about their own good deeds. God owes us nothing for our good deeds.

Prayer is an excellent revealer of the heart. The Pharisee had a proud, self-centered, self- righteous heart. He did not seem to need anything from God, but controlled his own life.



The Pharisee's attitude missed the mark!

How do I see myself?

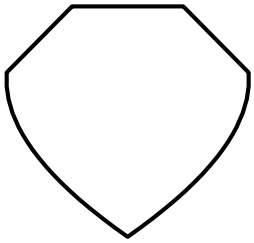


1. **Level of reason**

— Reasonableness

— Consistency

— fact-based experiences, such as studying.



2. **Level of emotion or heart**

— experiential knowledge

— inner being (Eph. 3:16–19)

— self-knowledge and understanding of the surrounding world.

Our choices and reactions are primarily determined by the understanding we gain from experience. We all need experiential knowledge of God. We must learn to listen to His voice.

> **“The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:3–4).**

Reason acknowledges the truth of the Bible. “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matt. 15:8). “In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (verse 9).

A religion based solely on reason is harsh and cold. It does not take into account the difficult life situations of other people, because there is no room for the Holy Spirit in the heart. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are emotions.

> **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).**

The Pharisee had only intellectual knowledge of God, but his heart remained untouched. The word of God had no place in the Pharisee's heart (John 8:37). We see this in his prayer.

The tax collector's effective prayer

The tax collector stood at a distance. He did not even dare to raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast and said, **"**God, be merciful to me, a sinner!**"** The tax collector had the opposite attitude to that of the Pharisee.

The tax collector had both a heartfelt and intellectual knowledge of God. He was ready to acknowledge his own sinfulness and humbly ask God for help. Such prayer always receives a powerful answer.

> **"Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds, and to everyone who knocks, it will be opened (Matt. 7:7–8).**

The tax collector listened to his heart, and his prayer was:

- humble
- honest
- unpretentious
- genuine
- he knew he was a sinner
- saw his own mistakes
- did not judge others
- was dependent on God.

The tax collector's attitude hit the mark. God heard his prayer. The tax collector went home righteous!

If we approach God with humility and helplessness, our attitude is right. The tax collector's prayer went straight to the heart of the matter. God wants to answer our prayers, but we often ask for the wrong things. Many are blind to the real needs of their hearts.

We must live in prayer. “Do this all in prayer and supplication. Pray at all times in the Spirit. Be alert and persistent in your prayers for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18).

To be successful and happy, we must be:

- authentic
- honest
- humble
- unpretentious
- reasonable
- living in dependence on God
- learn to tell God our needs.

Confess to God:

- your pride – your arrogance
- your pretense – your dishonesty
- your self-righteousness – your selfishness
- your rebelliousness – your defiance
- your anger – your bitterness
- your sins, which the Holy Spirit reveals to you when you ask.

“I tell you, this man went home justified, but the other did not. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

21

Your reward awaits you

“See that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you receive a full reward” (2 John 1:8).

One day, Suvi came to me for help. Her life was difficult. As a child, she did not learn to respect her parents, but stole money from them and was deliberately mean. Her parents had their own shop. No one noticed if money was missing from the cash register. She wasn't interested in school and didn't do her homework. She didn't respect her teachers, other adults, or even herself. After graduating from school, Suvi fell in love with a young man and got married, believing that her life was finally beginning. "Now I am loved and I can live free from my parents and my responsibilities," she thought. Suvi gave birth to two daughters, and soon she was pregnant again, expecting twins. Suvi was disappointed with life. No one had told her how much work and responsibility caring for and raising children requires. She no longer had time for herself. Suvi's disappointment was reflected in her marriage. Her spouse fled from difficulties and sought approval in the arms of other women. He demanded that Suvi have an abortion. Suvi refused. Her husband left his family and ran away. He moved far away. At this stage in her life, Suvi began to seek God. She began to understand that she was now reaping all the evil she had sown as a child and young woman. God, in His mercy, forgave her and took care of her family. Now these four children have families of their own. God takes good care of them. God turned Suvi's pain into her strength. She became empathetic towards others who were suffering.

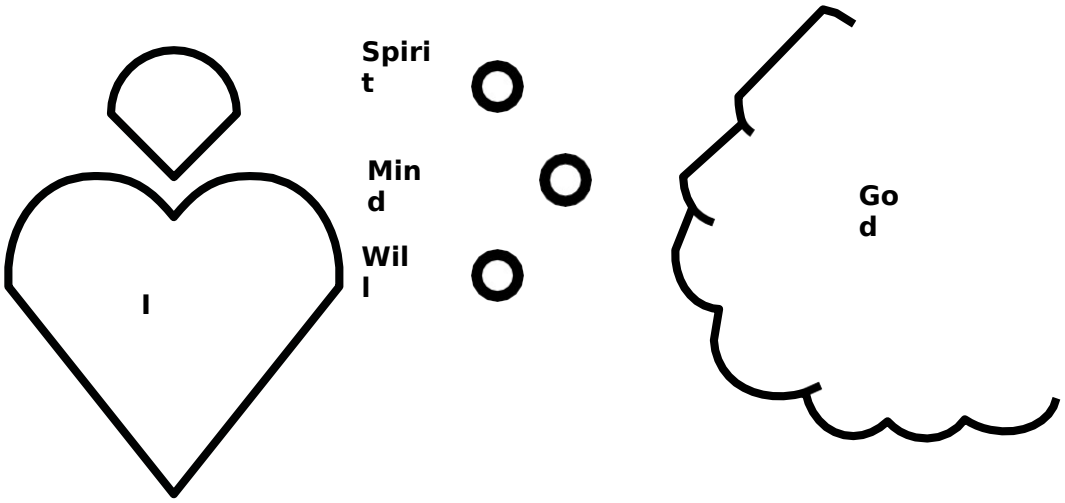
Respect has declined in today's world, even though it has the power to move hearts and build close relationships. It would be desirable for mutual respect to be restored to the lives of God's children. It opens us up to receive God's blessings. The enemy of our souls does everything he can to destroy true respect among us.

We are now embarking on a journey that will bring us closer to God's heart, which is the source of all respect.

Many have not learned the lesson of respect. That is why the apostle John writes: "Take heed to yourselves" (2 John 1:8, NKJV). It is

very important that we keep ourselves in the right relationship with God so that we do not "lose our reward." We must

must live in connection with the Spirit of God, our minds united with the mind of God, and our wills in harmony with the will of God.



By living this way, we will not lose our heritage.

It is best to learn constructive choices at a young age. Good habits build and support, while bad habits bring many kinds of difficulties. “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will not delight in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Wrong habits often lead to wrong choices. For example, an entrepreneur works hard for years to build a successful business. Then he makes some bad choices, which lead to a downward spiral. How sad it is when many years of work are lost because of wrong choices! That is why the Bible constantly encourages us: “But he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22, *see also* Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:13).

> **“We are partakers of Christ, if we hold fast to the end the confidence we had at the beginning” (Hebrews 3:14).**

“To the one who conquers, to the one who keeps my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations” (Rev. 2:26).

Christianity is a journey that requires perseverance. The most important thing is not starting the journey but reaching the destination. Our daily choices determine how we end our journey. These choices gradually form patterns that shape the journey of our lives. We find an example of this in 1 Kings 12.

There was a young king named Rehoboam. When it was his turn to rule the people, they came to him asking for relief from the hard labor that his father Solomon had imposed on them. The people asked that if he would ease their burden, they would be willing to serve him. Rehoboam asked his father's experienced advisors for advice. They replied to the king, "Do what the people ask, and they will serve you." This was good advice, but the inexperienced king rejected it because he had not learned to respect God or older people during his childhood. The king went to his friends to ask for advice. His young friends were inexperienced in ruling the people, but they believed in their own wisdom. They gave the king bad advice. The king accepted it, believing he could do whatever he wanted. The advice was: "My father laid a heavy yoke on you, but I will increase its weight. My father punished you with a whip, but I will punish you with a scourge" (verse 11).

The advice of his inexperienced friends had tragic consequences. The people rejected the king because he did not listen to them. His father's kingdom was torn in two, and he was left with only a small part to rule. Because of one wrong choice, he had to suffer for the rest of his life.

Perhaps this young prince had already hated his father and his parents' advice as a child and thought*, "As long as I am a prince, I will remain silent, but when I become king, I will not listen to those old*

men." He did not understand

that wrong choices had already developed into a pattern of thinking in his mind as a child. One day, he would behave foolishly based on those choices. When the important moment came, he lacked a constructive behavior pattern to be able to make sensible decisions.

A sure way to preserve what we earn through our work is to learn to develop sustainable ways of thinking as children. Learn to respect the advice of God and your parents. Every day we are faced with many choices. If we decide in our hearts to follow Jesus' example in every situation, we will receive our reward later (Hebrews 11:6; Psalm 19:8– 12; 1 Corinthians 3:14; Genesis 15:1). Then blessings will come to us both in this life and in the life to come.

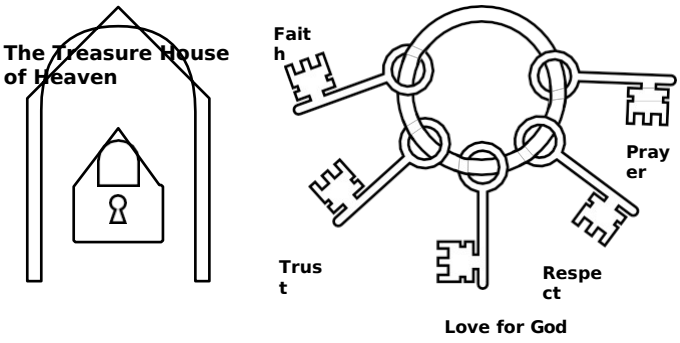
> **"... but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:8).**
>
> **“The righteous will be rewarded on earth, and the wicked and sinful will be punished” (Prov. 11:31).**
>
> **“The wicked are persecuted by troubles and adversities, but the righteous receive happiness as their reward” (Proverbs 13:21).**
>
> **“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers! Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:16–17).**

All goodness comes from God. Never think that heavy, difficult things come from God. He is the giver of all good things. God wants to reward us with His goodness.

> **“The blessing of the Lord brings prosperity, and he adds no trouble to it” (Proverbs 10:22).**
>
> **“The blessing of the faithful is abundant” (Proverbs 28:20).**

True reverence always comes from the heart. That is why God says to us: “Because this people approaches me only with their mouth and honors me only with their lips, because their heart is far from me and their obedience to me is only the observance of learned human commands, I will again do wonderful, and the wisdom of its wise men will perish, and the understanding of its discerning men will vanish” (Isaiah 29:13–14). Jesus expects us to honor him with all our hearts. Jesus said that the people of Nazareth did not honor him. They did not see him as sent by God and fulfilling his will. They saw him only as an ordinary young man. The attitudes of these people were an obstacle to Jesus’ work. He did not perform great miracles in his hometown, he did not heal the sick, nor did he free those bound by the devil, because they did not honor him. Jesus could not do anything for them.

“I will exalt those who honor me, but those who despise me will be disgraced” (1 Sam. 2:30).



Respect is one of the keys that unlocks the treasure chest of heaven for us.

The keys to heaven's treasure chest.

Those who honor God are also honored by God. Everyone who honors Jesus will receive honor from God in return—so that everyone will honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him” (John 5:23). And of the angels he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him” (Hebrews 1:6).

I assure you that God can use people who give Him thanks and glory for their achievements. “So no one can boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor. 1:29). God does not want us to be arrogant or conceited in His presence. He does not want us to take credit that belongs to Him. That is why He encourages the humble. Every time you succeed in your tasks, remember to give glory to God. “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10–11).

Shortly before Jesus was crucified, he said something remarkable about how the work he had begun would continue after his departure. “And I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Luke 13:35). In other words, “You will not see me again until you learn to recognize those whom I send, about whom you will say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We can also say it another way: “You will not see me until you learn to honor those whom I send in my name.” Think about this. Jesus says that he will reveal himself to those who bless and honor those whom he sends. Why?

> **“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person because he is righteous will receive a righteous person’s reward. And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple—truly, I say to you, he will not lose his reward” (Matt. 10:40–42).**

Jesus makes it clear that we must learn to respect prophets. Their task is to guide the righteous, the “least” and the “smallest.” Jesus takes note of everyone with whom his followers come into contact. If we respect those who are socially above us, we will be rewarded. If we respect those on our own level, we will also be rewarded. When we treat those entrusted to our care with respect, we will also receive a reward. God always rewards respect for other people.

Honor God

“Offer sacrifices to the Lord” (Proverbs 3:9). Above all else, we must value and respect God. We do not respect Him if we value people or objects more than God.

We have a good example in the Bible (1 Sam. 2:12–36). Eli was the high priest, the leader of the sanctuary. Eli's sons were worthless men. They did not respect God, people, or the sanctuary service. They behaved badly and took the best offerings for themselves, even by force. The transgression of Eli's sons was evil in the sight of the Lord. They defiled the sacrifice that belonged to the Lord. Eli knew about his sons' unworthy behavior, but he only rebuked them and allowed them to continue their bad behavior. If Eli had had more respect for God, he would have removed his sons from the sanctuary service and replaced them with people who respected God. What the Lord says to Eli "Why do you trample on the sacrifices and gifts that Why have I appointed my sanctuary for myself? Why do you honor your sons more than me? Why do you fatten yourselves on the best parts of the sacrifices of my people Israel?” (1 Sam. 2:29). God had promised Eli’s family that they would always serve the Lord in the sanctuary, but now the Lord says, “This will not happen! I will honor those who honor me, but those who despise me will be disgraced” (verse 30).

Because Eli honored his sons more than God, the curse fell on his entire family.

— No one in his family would live to old age.

— Most of them would fall by the sword.

— They would be forced to beg for their livelihood.

Eli did not receive a blessing as his reward, but instead suffered a great loss as a result of his wrong attitude. How sad!

How is it in your life? Do you honor God above all else? Or are your possessions, your spouse, your children, your work, your passions, your sports, etc. more important to you? Consider Eli's case, how his entire family suffered because of his wrong choices.

When should we not show respect? There are situations when showing respect is not appropriate. The Bible warns us about this. “As snow in summer and rain in harvest is foolish honor to a fool” (Proverbs 26:1, NKJV). “Like a stone in the lap of a fool is honor to a fool” (Proverbs 26:8). Who is foolish? The Bible gives us a good answer: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 53:2). “He who conceals his hatred speaks lies; he who spreads slander is a fool” (Prov. 10:18). “The way of a fool is to be a fool, but a wise man rejoices in wisdom” (Proverbs 10:23). “A fool thinks his own way is right, but a wise man listens to advice” (Proverbs 12:15). “The desire of a fool is not to understand, but to express his own opinion” (Proverbs 18:2, NKJV). “A fool speaks recklessly, but the lips of the wise keep them safe” (Proverbs 14:3). A fool lives according to his own mind. This is contrary to Jesus' teaching.

If we respect a foolish person, we bring pain and hardship upon our own lives

. This became evident in the family of the priest

Eel. The apostle John gives us serious advice:

> **“If anyone comes to you and does not teach this way, do not take him into your house or even greet him. Whoever greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 1:10–11).**

Demanding honor for ourselves

It is contrary to God’s will to demand honor for ourselves. We should not demand respect from our own family any more than from others. If we want respect, we must earn it. The Bible teaches us how we can gain respect.

> **“Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding, do not forget what I tell you, do not turn your back on it. Do not reject it, for it will protect you; love it, for it will be your security. Get wisdom, for it is more precious than rubies; get understanding, and apply your heart to it. Cherish it, and it will bring you honor; it will bring you glory if you take it to heart” (Proverbs 4:5–8).**

Hold on to wisdom, for it will bring you honor. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding” (Ps. 111:10). The fear (reverence) of the Lord causes us to obey God’s word in various areas of life. When we have decided to give our hearts to Jesus, we have the motivation and desire to follow His commands and instructions.

I know people who apply the words of the Bible to their own lifestyle and beliefs. When they read the Bible, they see its instructions through the lens of their own distorted beliefs. Studying God’s word requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we can understand our own needs. If we are not aware of our own distorted values, attitudes, and patterns of thinking and feeling, we cannot surrender them to God. We must confess them to God and ask for freedom from their power. We behave according to our beliefs.

Studying God's Word leads us to respect God and make wise choices in life. Those who want to live righteously love mercy and have compassion on those who suffer. They live humbly before God. They have learned to accept the rebuke they need. The Bible advises: “The unruly will be in poverty and shame, but honor comes to those who heed rebuke” (Proverbs 13:18). Learn to love the truth more than your personal comfort. This will bring you honor. “The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord is life, prosperity, and honor” (Proverbs 22:4). God promises you honor if you choose to follow Him. Blessings come in His time and in His way.

“Pride leads to humiliation, but humility brings honor” (Proverbs 29:23).

Paul called himself the least of all the apostles and even a great sinner. He never forgot his first encounter with Christ. Everything he had, God had given him. “Who gives you any reason to be proud? What do you have that you did not receive? If everything you have is a gift, why do you boast as if it were your own achievement?” (1 Cor. 4:7). In his letter to the Romans, Paul gives us good advice for life (Rom. 12:9–21). When we decide to live humbly before God, we will not lose what we have earned through our work.

22

Pastoral Care

In order to be able to help those in need, a pastor's own life must be in balance.

Those who are interested in helping others must dare to face their own weaknesses, difficulties, bad habits, and attitudes before they are ready to help others. They must first heal themselves. Then it will be easier for them to understand and gently address the difficulties of others.

Maturity is balance in your own life.

- **Physical balance:** work and rest, outdoor activities, exercise, and nutrition should be in balance.
- **Social life**: relaxation, hobbies, and contact with friends "recharge your batteries."
- **Mental balance:** believing in God, His love and His promises, and being aware of your own strengths.
- **Spiritual life:** a close relationship with God and a constructive attitude towards others.

Example of a pastoral care situation

1. Pastoral care situations are strictly confidential.

2. The spiritual counselor should sit opposite the person seeking help to ensure eye contact.

3. The meeting begins with a prayer asking for the presence of the Holy Spirit to encourage the person in need of help to face the unresolved issues in their life. In the prayer, all evil spirits must be bound in the name of Jesus Christ so that they cannot cause any disturbance.

4. The spiritual counselor should ask what the person seeking help wants to discuss.

5. If the inner pain is so great that the person does not know where to start, the spiritual counselor may ask him, "*What kind of relationship did you have with your father?*"

6. The spiritual counselor may suggest a small test to help the person

more easily access their childhood feelings toward their father. The spiritual counselor asks them to

to close their eyes and ask them to remember the kitchen of their childhood home, where they are sitting at the table at the age of about 6–8. Once they have this image in their mind, the test continues. The kitchen door opens and their father enters the room. The spiritual counselor asks, "*What feelings did your father's entrance evoke in you?*" If strong negative feelings arise, they need to be addressed.

7. Once the relationship with the father has been clarified and forgiveness has usually been chosen, the discussion continues in a similar manner with regard to the relationship with the mother and other family relationships.

8. For each family member, the spiritual counselor asks whether the person seeking help is ready to choose forgiveness for the family members who have hurt them or other people in their life. Once forgiveness has been chosen, the spiritual counselor takes the person by the hands and prays as follows:

> *"Today, this friend has chosen to forgive those who have hurt and offended him (you can name the person and also the thing he is forgiving). His heart is open, and he is ready to give up his pain, anger, bitterness, and other negative feelings to be nailed to the cross at Golgotha, where they belong, because Jesus died so that he might live. Dear God, give him a new heart and a new strong spirit."*

"God, create in me a clean heart and renew me, give me a strong spirit" (Ps. 51:12).

9. If, as the conversation continues, unspecified negative feelings arise, such as constant feelings of anger, guilt, and fear, the pastor should ask: *"Do you have bad habits, such as violent behavior, name-calling, blaming, threatening, mocking, or swearing? Do you have learning difficulties, such as dyslexia?"*

If they do not accept their own gender:

- Were you severely abused as a child?
- Do you suffer from depression?
- Do you escape into a fantasy world?
- Do you doubt God's love for you?
- Do you have nightmares?
- Are you a workaholic?
- Do you have difficulty loving or receiving love?
- Do you feel a constant need for physical contact: do you believe that you are not worthy of love or acceptance?

Figuring these things out requires prayer. The Bible teaches us: “A good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A tree is known by its fruit” (Matthew 12:33). In pastoral care, we always go from the fruit to the roots. The roots of the tree grow in our hearts. Paul tells us, "If the root is holy, so are the branches" (Rom. 11:16). Matthew tells us that "the axe is already laid at the root of the trees. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:10).

God wants us to give our hearts to him. That is where the fruit of our actions ripens. “Give me your heart, my son, and let my ways be pleasing to you” (Proverbs 23:26, NIV). For “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander” (Matthew 15:19).

Only with God's power can we destroy the strongholds in our minds that the enemy of our souls has built in our hearts. The Bible exhorts us: "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots" (Matt. 15:13). This is the Bible’s perspective on pastoral care. If I do not understand or know the cause of the difficulties of the person seeking help, I ask them to close their eyes so that they can better understand what God is ready to reveal to them.

“Then he made his lamp shine on me, and I walked through the darkness in his light” (Job 29:3).

“You, Lord, light my lamp; you, God, bring light to my darkness” (Ps. 18:29).

In God’s light and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can once again walk through even the darkest moments of our lives and allow God to heal our wounds.

Example:

The person seeking help sits in front of me. I take their hands and pray that the Holy Spirit will take them back in time to the situation that the Holy Spirit wants to heal in them today and at the same time show them the roots of this difficulty. All the events and feelings of our lives are stored in our minds, even if we don't remember them. We have shut out many difficult childhood experiences from our consciousness. It would be too hard for a child to live with them. The Holy Spirit is able to open these closed parts of the mind.

During prayer, I also bind evil spirits from disturbing the prayer situation. I do this in the name of Jesus and in the power of His blood. After prayer, the person seeking help can keep their eyes closed. I ask them what memories the Holy Spirit brought to their mind. We discuss them together. The most important thing is what the person believed about themselves as a child at the time of the event that hurt them and how they felt. I also ask Jesus to reveal himself in that situation to support the child. When the person recalls their own feelings about the event and has an understanding of themselves, I ask Jesus to reveal his perspective/truth to them. The devil puts his own lie into every wound in the heart. This lie hurts more than the event itself. Only Jesus can replace the lie with the truth. The Bible says, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

A 40-year-old woman came to me. She was a Christian, but suffered from intense fits of anger. Partly as a result of this, her husband had left her. The woman had prayed a lot for her problems, but help did not come. We prayed together that God would show her where the roots of her anger lay. The Holy Spirit brought to her mind an incident that had happened when she was about six years old. Something small that she believed she was doing right was wrong in her mother's eyes. Her mother whipped her until she was bruised. The punishment was excessive. The enemy had planted a lie in the little girl's heart: "You are worthless! You are good for nothing."

These false beliefs affected her life. She constantly felt bad. She had forgotten the whole thing and did not understand that this little girl needed to forgive her mother. And because she did not understand this, she was "in prison" (Matt. 18:34–35).

After praying, the little girl chose to forgive her mother. Then I asked God to take away all the negative feelings from this little girl's heart and nail them to the cross at Golgotha. Jesus died so that we might live. I asked God to give her a new heart and a new strong spirit. She also confessed her unforgiveness and anger, after which I read her the text: "If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). After that, I told God in prayer that she believes she is worthless and bad, and I asked God to reveal Himself to this wounded child (John 14:21). I also asked God to reveal the truth to her instead of lies. Jesus spoke the truth into the girl's heart: "You are my beloved child."

The woman began to cry because she couldn't believe how Juma-la touched her heart and healed her wounded little child. Mark says, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them" (Mark 10:14). How often should we bring our wounded children to Jesus to be healed and blessed? Finally, we thanked God for His help and blessed her with all the blessings of heaven. The woman left happy

. She went to make peace with her spouse, who was ready to forgive her.

10. If the person in need does not experience Christ's presence when approaching the dark areas of their life, then we must pray to God to remove whatever is blocking Christ's presence. There can be many reasons for this, such as unforgiveness, various forms of anger, pride, disappointment, jealousy, fear, shame, experiences of rejection, various forms of abuse, false vows, difficulties passed down from generation to generation, or some other issue that imprisons or controls the emotional life.

11. A person must accept their own problem and be prepared to let go of it through resolution and forgiveness.

12. Everyone's memory and memories have many layers that require clarification. If we are unwilling or unprepared to clarify the things and events that burden our emotional life, they tend to gradually poison our personality and tie up more and more of our energy.

13. Once these obstacles have been overcome, we pray that Christ will reveal Himself to the person seeking help, so that they may experience comfort and healing. Jesus promises us: “My Father loves those who love me, and I love them and reveal myself to them” (John 14:21).

Isaiah comforts us:

> **“The high and lofty One who lives forever, whose name is holy, says this: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with the brokenhearted and humble. I revive the spirit of the brokenhearted and revive the heart of the humble’” (Isaiah 57:15).**

We tend to interpret our childhood families and experiences in many different ways. We may try to understand and explain away many kinds of hurtful or damaging behavior by our parents, even appealing to the Ten Commandments. There we are exhorted: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12, NIV). We honor our parents as God's creations and redeemed beings, but that does not mean we honor their wrong or hurtful actions and attitudes. We must also honor ourselves and be honest before God when seeking help.

14. If someone in need of help expresses an inexplicable feeling of unease, the counselor should ask, *“Why do you feel uneasy?”*

— The question "why" helps a person to grasp many forgotten things.

— A spiritual counselor should not feed their own curiosity with questions.

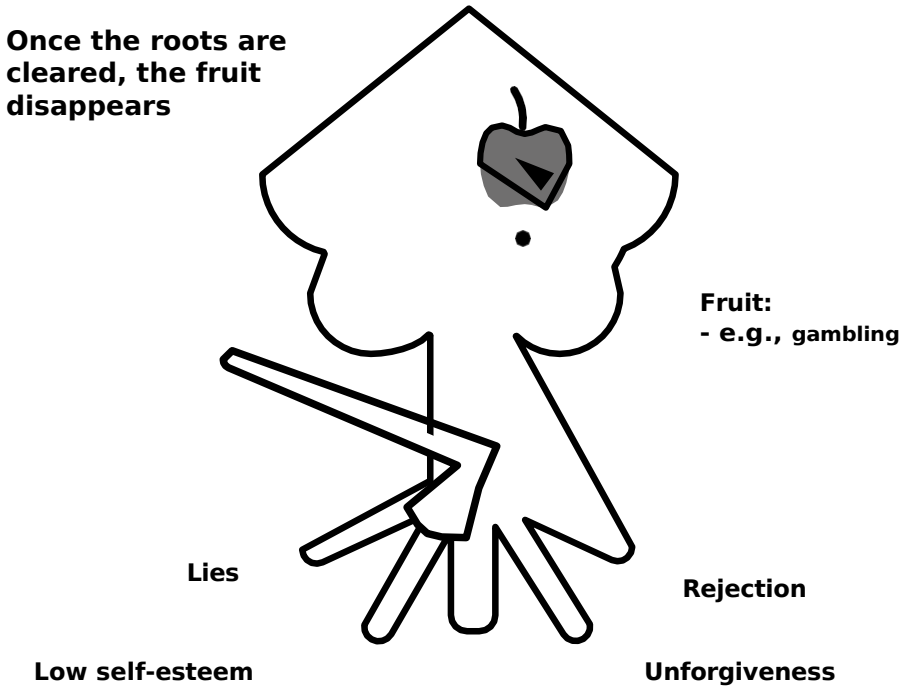
— The conversation is conducted on the terms of the person seeking help; in other words, if they do not want to talk about a certain topic, it is left to wait for its own time.

The prayer support provided by a spiritual counselor can help a person break free from sin. “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). However, the English *King James* Version clearly distinguishes between mistakes (errors, wrong steps, offenses against others, etc.) and sins. Sins are confessed to God, mistakes are admitted and confessed to one another, and we pray for one another.

Our tendency toward evil is not in itself a sin, but it exposes us to temptation. We all have inherited and acquired tendencies toward evil, which are our weaknesses and mistakes. The Epistle of James tells us about this (James 1:13–15). In the moment of temptation, we can choose whether to give in to temptation or to avoid falling by the power of God. When our will is in harmony with temptation, sin is conceived. Conceived sins do not necessarily manifest themselves immediately, but may remain dormant for a long time, waiting for an opportunity to spring forth. Conceived sins can be gotten rid of by aborting them. They must be confessed to God and forgiveness must be sought from God in order to be set free.

15. The pastor must patiently wait to see how the Holy Spirit speaks to the person seeking help. “I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

16. In the closing prayer, the person seeking help is blessed and encouraged to trust in God’s presence and His promises: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you! Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous, mighty hand. For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand and say to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you’” (Isa. 41:10, 13). The process of healing the soul can continue throughout life, because the enemy of the soul rules in this dark world. But thank God that Christ has conquered the world through His death on the cross and wants to be the victor in your life too!



In spiritual care, the focus is always on the fruit, not the roots. "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9).

“Dear Heavenly Father, teach us to pray in every difficult situation in life with the words you guide us to say. Teach us to hear your voice and obey it. Open our eyes to see the pain and difficulties of those close to us, and teach us to support them with your mercy and love, so that we do not turn against them and judge them for their difficulties and weaknesses.

Fill us with faith and trust in you and in the work of reconciliation that you, Jesus, have done for us, and encourage us as Christ's messengers to speak the word of reconciliation to those who seek you and to those who suffer. Thank you for hearing us as we pray in the name of Jesus, our precious Savior. Amen.

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